

# THE RIGHT TO STRUGGLE

Selected Writings of Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question



Edited by Markar Melkonian  
Second Edition



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Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question

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*Front Cover Photo:* The author in Karabagh (1993), by Hovanness Armenakian.

*Back Cover Photo:* The author in Yerevan (1993), by Seta Melkonian.

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*This book is dedicated to  
comrades Garlen Ananian and Aram Vartanian,  
and to all those who will continue their struggle.*



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I am in the awkward position of wanting to thank many people who must, for the time being, remain anonymous. Many have helped me in research and discussion of ideas, while others have provided material and moral support to myself and other comrades, often at great sacrifice and even at personal risk. To these friends and comrades I extend my heartfelt gratitude.

M.M.

*(Location unknown, early 1990)*



### A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR ON THE SECOND EDITION

Unfortunately, strict conditions of secrecy made it impossible for me to proofread the First Edition before it went to press. In it, much of my original writing was condensed to avoid repetition. At times this meant a change of style and some change of vocabulary. In most cases the end result was a net improvement on the text as a whole; occasionally, however, this was not the case. Most of the changes in this Second Edition are corrections of *my own* faulty formulations in the original texts. Among these faulty formulations, I should mention my overestimation of progress in Soviet Armenia and, in particular, my lenient use of the term "socialist" to designate a system which, time and again, stifled socialist initiatives. For this I especially beg the pardon of our Soviet Armenian compatriots, who are very close to the reality of the situation. At the same time, I hope my compatriots will be able to avoid swaying like a pendulum from past misconceptions to new ones.

Finally, I would like wholeheartedly to thank the comrades of the Sardarabad Collective for their work in making this volume available to the general public.

M.M.

(*Eastern Europe*, June 6, 1990)



## EDITOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

While in Armenia for my brother's funeral last summer, people asked me over and over again for more information about Monte. They wanted to know about the events of his life and the circumstances of his death, of course, but many also wanted to know more about his philosophical and political views. Few people were aware that the legendary military leader had in fact written voluminously on the subjects of the Armenian national question, recent Armenian history and military strategy. Over the years, some of this material has appeared in small journals, magazines and pamphlets published in half a dozen countries. Much of it, however, remains unpublished. I hope the present collection of essays, together with a number of other texts planned for publication in Armenian and English, will introduce a wider audience to his views.

With regard to profile information, a biography may well appear before too long. In the meantime, the balance of this preface will answer some of the more frequently asked questions about Monte's thirty-five and one-half years of life.

### Early Years

Monte was born November 25, 1957, in Tulare County, California. He was the third of four children born to a self-employed cabinetmaker and an elementary-school teacher. His maternal grandmother, Yemima, was born in the town of Marsovan, in what was then the Ottoman Empire. Her family members were among the first Armenians to settle in Fresno County, and she arrived there in 1883, at the age of three. Monte's maternal grandfather, Misak, arrived in the U.S. in 1896, after fleeing Marsovan. (By the time he was thirty, Misak had been imprisoned by Turkish officials at least three times, apparently because of his involvement in what he referred to as "a secret Armenian Revolutionary Society.") Monte's maternal grandparents became small-plot table-grape farmers. His paternal grandfather, Ghazar, was an orphan and a shepherd from the village of Kharatsor, in the Kharpert region of what is currently eastern Turkey. Ghazar and his wife, Haiganoush, arrived in the U.S. with the oldest of their children in 1913. They became farm laborers in Fresno County.

As a boy growing up in rural Central California, Monte's early years resembled those of William Saroyan's Aram. He even swam in the same Thompson Ditch that Saroyan mentioned in at least one short story. He attended public school, played the clarinet and was a formidable baseball pitcher. His many pets—including rabbits, pigeons and tortoises—roamed freely in his parents' garden.

Like his parents, Monte encountered racism on the playgrounds and



baseball diamonds of the San Joaquin Valley. Unlike his parents, however, he was a target of bigotry not because he was a "Fresno Indian" (a derogatory term for Armenians) but because he was mistaken for a Chicano. Despite the racism, however, he was popular, becoming the first class president of his elementary school.

In spring 1970, Monte's parents traveled with their children across Turkey to Marsovan. There, they located his mother's ancestral house and visited with a family of Turkified Armenians. Years later, Monte looked back on this trip as a turning point in his life. In more than one interview, he observed that this episode, as much as anything else, was responsible for his decision to identify himself first and foremost as an Armenian.

In addition to acquiring a strong curiosity about his ancestors, he also contracted a case of wanderlust. At the age of fifteen, he left for Japan, originally on a youth exchange program. Once there, however, he extended his stay to a year, studying martial arts and learning the language. (French journalist Charles Villeneuve reported that when he first met him in Beirut in the early 1980s, Monte was serving as a Japanese-French translator at a press conference for members of the Japanese Red Army.)

From Japan he traveled on his own to Southeast Asia, including Vietnam not long before its liberation. This trip also exerted a lifelong influence on him. In a videotaped interview in early 1992, he pointed to the Vietnamese national liberation struggle as an inspirational example for Karabagh.

Returning to the U.S., he graduated from high school and entered the University of California at Berkeley, with an individualized major in ancient Asian history and archaeology. In 1978 he helped to organize an exhibition of Armenian cultural artifacts at one of the university's libraries. The section of this exhibit dealing with the 1915-18 genocide was removed by university authorities, at the request of the Turkish consul general in San Francisco. The display that was removed was eventually reinstalled, however, as university officials reluctantly bowed to pressure from a campus protest movement.

Monte completed his bachelor's degree in less than three years, writing an honors thesis on the subject of Urartuan royal rock-cut tombs. Partly on the basis of this thesis, the department of archaeology at Oxford University sought him out for graduate work.

### Revolution, Civil War and Prison

After graduating from U.C. Berkeley in the spring of 1978, however, Monte traveled to Iran, where he taught English and participated in the movement to overthrow the Shah. He helped organize a teachers' strike at his school in Teheran, and was in the vicinity of the square at Medaneh Jaleh when the Shah's troops opened fire on protesters, killing and injuring many. Later, he found his way to Iranian Kurdistan, where Kurdish partisans made

a deep impression on him. Years later, in southern Lebanon, he occasionally wore the uniform of the Kurdish *peshmerga* which he was given in Iranian Kurdistan.

In the fall of 1978, Monte made his way to Beirut, in time to participate in the defense of the Armenian quarter against rightist attacks. At this time, he met his long-time confidante and future wife, Seta Kbranian. He also met economist and activist Alec Yenikomshian, who Monte admired greatly and from whom he learned much.

Monte was a member of the Armenian militia in Bourj Hamoud for almost two years, during which time he participated in several street battles against rightist forces. He also began working behind the lines in Phalangist-controlled territory, on behalf of the "Leftist and Muslim" Lebanese National Movement.

By this time, he was speaking Armenian—a language he did not learn until adulthood. (Actually, Armenian was the fourth or fifth language Monte learned to speak fluently, after Spanish, French and Japanese. In addition, he spoke passable Arabic, Italian and Turkish, as well as some Farsi and Kurdish.)

In the spring of 1980, Monte was inducted into the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), and secretly relocated to West Beirut. For the next three years he was an ASALA militant and contributor to the group's journal, *Hayastan*. During this time several Palestinian resistance organizations provided their Armenian comrade with extensive military training.

Monte carried out armed operations in Rome, Athens and elsewhere, and he helped to plan and train commandos for the "Van Operation" of September 24, 1981, in which four ASALA militants took over the Turkish embassy in Paris and held it for several days. In November 1981, French police arrested and imprisoned a young, suspected "terrorist" carrying a Cypriot passport bearing the name "Dimitri Georgiu." Following the detonation of several bombs in Paris aimed at gaining his release, "Georgiu" was returned to Lebanon where he revealed his identity as Monte Melkonian.

During the Zionist invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982, Monte led a group of fighters who made their way by foot from southern Lebanon to Beirut, under heavy bombardment. There, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with other young men and women who defended the civilians of that city against wholesale slaughter sanctioned and bankrolled by the very governments that regularly denounce "international terrorism."

In mid-July 1983, ASALA violently split into two factions, one opposed to the group's despotic leader, whose *nom de guerre* was "Hagop Hagopian," and another supporting him. Although the lines of fissure had been deepening over the course of several years, one event—the shooting of



Hagopian's two closest aids at a military camp in Lebanon—finally led to the open breach. This impetuous action was perpetrated by one individual who was not closely affiliated with Monte. As a result of this action, however, Hagopian took revenge by personally torturing and executing two of Monte's dearest comrades, Garlen Ananian and Aram Vartanian.

In the aftermath of this split Monte spent over two years underground, in Lebanon and later in France. After testifying secretly for the defense in the trial of Armenian militant and accused bank robber Levon Minassian, he was arrested in Paris in November 1985, and sentenced to six years in prison for possession of falsified papers and an illegal handgun. (For a more detailed account of these events, refer to the "Editor's Preface to the First Edition," below.)

### Armenia, at Last

Monte spent over three years in Fresnes and Poissy prisons. He was released in early 1989 and sent from France to South Yemen, where he was reunited with Seta. He then spent another year and a half living underground in eastern Europe, as one regime after another disintegrated around him. Eventually, he made his way to what was then still Soviet Armenia. Seta and Monte were married at the monastery of Geghart in August of 1991.

Finding himself on Armenian soil after many long years, he wrote in a letter that he found a lot of confusion among his compatriots. Armenia faced enormous economic, political and environmental problems at every turn—problems which had festered for decades. Unfortunately, new political forces bent on dismantling the Soviet Union were taking Armenia in a direction which Monte believed was bound to exacerbate the crisis and produce even worse problems. The leaders of these forces gained overwhelming popular support in the late 1980s, thanks to what in retrospect appears to have been an unbroken series of arrogant reactions, miscalculations and blunders on the part of Mikhail Gorbachev and his would-be reformers. (A discussion of these developments appears in the first two sections of Chapter Five, below.) As a result, Yerevan was swept up in an atmosphere of chauvinism and exasperatingly foolish illusions about the West.

Under these circumstances, it quickly became clear to Monte that, for better or for worse, the Soviet Union had no future and the coming years would be perilous ones for the Armenian people. He then focused his energy on Karabagh. "If we loose [Karabagh]," the bulletin of the Karabagh Defense Forces quoted him as saying, "we turn the final page of our people's history." He believed that, if Azeri forces succeeded in deporting Armenians from Karabagh, they would advance on Zangezur and other regions of Armenia. Thus, he saw the fate of Karabagh as crucial for the long-term security of the entire Armenian nation.

Ever true to his convictions, he fought in the Shahumian region north of Karabagh for three months in the fall of 1991. (Refer to the map at the end of Chapter Five.) Forces with which he fought helped to recapture several key Armenian villages from Azeri forces.

In a video lecture recorded in early 1992, Monte stated that, within the coming year, Armenians would either establish a land bridge linking the Republic of Armenia with Karabagh, or the Azeri military would succeed in "solving" the problem of Karabagh once and for all, by deporting Armenians *en masse*. Sure enough, within a year, Armenian forces—including fighters Monte led—opened an overland corridor through the town of Lachin, thus linking the Armenian Republic with Karabagh.

After a short stint helping to defend the Ichevan region in northeastern Armenia against Azeri attack, Monte accepted a position as commander of the region of Martuni, in southeastern Karabagh. There, he reorganized fighters into an effective and disciplined force, armed in large part with captured Azeri equipment. Under his command, his three to four thousand fighters and fifty tanks successfully defended a mountainous region of 200 square miles, populated by some 28,000 people, mostly peasants involved in agriculture and wine production. His fighters recaptured much land and won one battle after another.

Monte's forces also fought on other fronts, in Mardakert and elsewhere. In April 1993, he was one of the chief military strategists who planned and led the operation to capture the region of Kelbajar, between the Republic of Armenia and Karabagh. Although vastly outnumbered, Armenian forces captured the region in four sleepless days of heavy fighting, sustaining far fewer fatalities than the enemy.

Throughout these operations, Monte maintained respect for Azeri non-combatants. On one occasion, his troops evacuated Azeri residents caught in the fighting, delivering them to safety by armored personnel carrier. In Kelbajar he addressed enemy soldiers by megaphone, assuring them in Turkish that those who were to lay down their arms and pull back from the front would not be fired on. And in an interview videotaped not long before his death, he lamented the lack of regard Azeri leaders have shown for their own fighters: "It's a shame that they send them against us, with so little preparation, to be killed like that."

In the early stages of fighting in Karabagh, small groups of volunteers, or "brigades" (*jogadner*) played a major role in the fighting. Monte was a member of one such group in the Shahumian Region. He quickly became disenchanted with them, however, for a number of reasons: their tendency to emulate the Azeri practice of executing captured prisoners; their adoption, in more than one case, of the aesthetic trappings of fascism; and their military inefficiency, compared to more professionally organized and disciplined



regional forces. For these and perhaps other reasons, he set out to curtail the activities of the "brigades" in Martuni.

Monte never wore a pistol; he never smoked; he swore very rarely; and he never drank liquor while in military uniform. When he participated in the traditional toasts, he would raise a glass of yoghurt. He handed his monthly salary over to cooks, cleaning women and the families of wounded soldiers, and time and again he turned down privileges, preferring to live under the same conditions as the fighters under his command.

He established a policy of collecting a tax in kind on Martuni wine, in the form of diesel and ammunition for his fighters. One night in January 1993, he personally stopped a truck smuggling contraband wine to Stepanakert, and dumped the entire tankload onto the road. A couple of weeks before his death, he incurred the wrath of local mafia bosses in Karabagh—and defied the advice of close friends—by burning a large field of cultivated cannabis plants.

Monte's activities in Martuni were not limited to the military field. He supported the operation of a cooperative bakery in Martuni; he visited reactivated elementary schools and hospitals; and at the time of his death, he and Seta were planning to set up a worker-owned carpet manufactory, to employ local women who were skilled weavers.

In a country with a rigidly patriarchal culture, Monte discouraged discrimination against women, chiefly by setting an example for men to follow in the conduct of their daily affairs. He washed dishes, appealed to women to fight on the front lines and considered female staff in the radio room and the kitchen at headquarters to be fighters on an equal footing with uniformed soldiers on the battlefield.

His reputation for modesty and directness earned him the affection of the civilians he defended. Knowing that he had a special weakness for yoghurt, women would press jars of it into his hands as he passed through their villages in his jeep.

### Fallen in Battle

I have read several inaccurate accounts of what took place in the abandoned Azeri village of Merzuli in the early afternoon of June 12, 1993. There were unfounded reports that Monte's body had been mutilated, and rumors that he was killed not by Azeri soldiers but by Armenian mafiosos. Seta and I spoke with the survivors of the battle who were in Monte's jeep, as well as with a young Azeri soldier captured the day of Monte's death. The story we pieced together is as follows:

Monte and his fighters rose long before sunrise on the morning of June 12, to mount an operation against Azeri artillery positions in the Aghdam region. By about noon, the operation was successfully completed. At the

conclusion of the battle, Monte was informed by radio that his fighters had captured a T-72 tank in Merzuli, on the plain just below the ridge from which they had launched their attack that morning. In keeping with Monte's policy of personally inspecting all captured equipment, he, his devoted driver Komidas, and four other fighters climbed into a jeep and headed down from the mountains toward Merzuli, which they believed had been abandoned by enemy troops earlier that day.

Riding with Monte and Komidas were two young officers named Hovig and Saro, a senior light-tank commander named Saribeg, and another fighter named Kevork. They approached an intersection near an old tractor station on the outskirts of the village at about 1:20 p.m. There, they noticed a BMP (an armored personnel carrier with a light turret-mounted canon) parked perhaps thirty meters away, on the road perpendicular to the direction in which they were driving. Believing the BMP to be manned by their own fighters, Monte's driver parked in the intersection and approached it on foot. Komidas, who was wearing an Azeri military uniform, asked the occupants of the BMP if they were Armenian. Although Komidas speaks fluent Azerbaijani Turkish, he asked the question in Armenian, which many Azeris from the area speak.

When the answer came in the negative, the occupants of the jeep jumped out of the vehicle and ran for cover under a hail of automatic weapons fire from the BMP. The Armenians returned fire with their light arms. (At the time of his death, the thirty-round clip in Monte's rifle contained only twenty or twenty-one rounds. Since he habitually reloaded at every opportunity, it is likely that he fired nine or ten rounds at this time.) Komidas, Hovig and Saro were all hit in their legs, and Saribeg was wounded gravely. The BMP fired a first canon round, but it missed its target.

Monte, who dove to the road to avoid being hit, drew himself up and began running to take cover behind a stone wall on the side of the road. As he neared the wall, the BMP fired a second canon round which hit the wall and burst, wounding Saro again and sending a large piece of shell casing into Monte's forehead, just above his right eye. He fell to the road on his side and died either immediately or within several seconds, with his eyes half closed and a peaceful expression on his face. The BMP then accelerated through the intersection to make its escape.

Hovig cradled Monte in his arms and called in reinforcements by radio. According to more than one account, the reinforcements caught up with the Azeri fighting group, killing several enemy soldiers and capturing at least one. The BMP and its occupants, however, escaped.

Meanwhile, Monte's body and his wounded comrades were evacuated to the village of Martuni. There, Saribeg died, leaving his five children without a father, and his impoverished family without a breadwinner.



It is still not clear to me why the Azeri BMP remained behind in Merzuli. It might have been on a reconnaissance mission, or it simply might have lost its way. In any case, what seems to have happened at that intersection on June 12 was a chance meeting between enemy forces. And in this confrontation, the Azeris had the advantage of armor and a turret-mounted canon.

Less than a month after Monte and Saribeg were killed, the town and region of Martuni were officially renamed 'Monteapert' ("Monte's Fortress"). And not long after they were buried, Armenian forces advanced well into the Aghdam region.

Once news of Monte's death spread, most of the adult population of Monteapert turned out to pay their respects to their beloved "Avo," the person they associated with pushing Azeris beyond GRAD-rocket range of their village. Many Monteapertsi's demanded that he be buried in Karabagh, some even to the point of physically obstructing attempts to load his coffin into a helicopter bound for Yerevan. In the end, however, they bowed to Seta's wish to airlift the body back to the Armenian capital for burial.

Monte was buried with full military honors on June 19, 1993. According to one estimate, some 15,000 people filed past his open casket as it lay in state at the Officer's Hall in Yerevan. Among the dignitaries present were Levon Ter-Petrossian, President of the Republic of Armenia, high-ranking Armenian and C.I.S. military leaders, and members of all the major political parties in the country. Friends and comrades also came from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, France and the United States. According to published reports, between one hundred and two hundred fifty thousand people turned out to attend the funeral. (I'm not sure how these figures were arrived at: it would have been very difficult to count the thousands of mourners who thronged Republican Square to view the caisson which bore the casket, filled the streets leading to Zoravar Vartan Church where final rites were held, lined the road to the cemetery, and stood for hours under the hot sun at the grave site.)

Monte was buried at Yeraplur, overlooking the Ararat Plain. In the distance, Mount Ararat rises above the horizon, just beyond the Turkish frontier. Some authorities in the Armenian Ministry of Defense had wanted to bury him at Tsitsernakapert, on the hill above Yerevan where the memorial to victims of the 1915-18 genocide is located. Since 1988, several people had been buried there—among these, one or two individuals with whom Monte had little in common politically, philosophically or personally. Monte's widow refused to allow this to take place, insisting instead that her husband be buried alongside other comrades who fell in Karabagh.

### A Teacher by Example

Monte—or Avo, his *nom de guerre* in Karabagh—was many things to many people: To an Azerbaijani embassy official in Washington D.C., he

was a "terrorist with a criminal background"; to prosecutors in Paris he was a *malfaiteur*; to the U.S. State Department he was a "threat to national security"; to more than one village woman in Karabagh, he was a "saint"; to a French wire service reporter he was a "*legende vivante*"; to an unnamed Armenian quoted by a *New York Times* correspondent, he was "the best god we ever had," and to the mothers of Monteapert, he was the first person to thank for the fact that their children no longer had to huddle in basements for fear of rocket attacks.

Monte was a cheerful comrade, an indomitable adversary, a brilliant strategist and a gallant *fedaii*. Above all, perhaps, he was a teacher who taught by example. In the example of his life, he still offers us lessons—lessons about what is important in life, and about the possibilities available even to the most outgunned and beleaguered victims of aggression. He taught us that it is possible to be an intellectual without being an elitist, a patriot without being a chauvinist, and a warrior without being a warmonger. Now it is up to us to ensure that the next generation learns from the example of Monte's life.

\* \* \*

The First Edition of this book, which I edited under a pseudonym, was prepared despite unrealistic time and budget constraints. In retrospect, the small print run of several hundred copies might have been a blessing in disguise, in view of Monte's reservations regarding the First Edition (expressed in "A Word from the Author on the Second Edition," above).

Most of the material for the First Edition of *The Right to Struggle* arrived in San Francisco in four brown-paper envelopes with Yugoslav postmarks dated June 12, 1989. Monte had arranged the material in chapters and sections, generally corresponding to its present form. Several articles included in the First Edition have been omitted from the Second Edition at the author's request. The Epilogue, "Imperialism in the New World Order," was appended to the Second Edition, with his approval. The only text of Monte's that appears here without his explicit approval is his "Letter from Shahumian," included here in Chapter Five, because he felt strongly that information about the fighting in Shahumian should be disseminated.

Some passages in the following pages appear moot today, if viewed narrowly from the perspective of Monte's immediate political aims. From this perspective, of course, his repeated opposition to Armenian secession from the Soviet Union is particularly dated. It should be noted, however, that by the winter of 1990 at the latest—judging from the evidence of his personal correspondence and conversations—Monte had concluded that secession was inevitable. Since then, he had many opportunities to omit



these "moot" passages, yet he chose not to.

I believe this is significant. Monte had learned, through bitter experience in Hagopian's ASALA, how dangerous it is to allow oneself to be swept up by the fashionable slogans of the day, rather than thinking for oneself. His argument against Armenian secession from the Soviet Union was the result of independent thinking. Apparently, he believed that his argument remained valid, even after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. (Indeed, much of his argument applies equally to Armenian membership in a stronger and better-defined Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.)) Perhaps this is why he did not have the "moot" passages deleted from the Second Edition of this book, even at the risk of appearing to be hopelessly out of step with popular opinion and subsequent political developments.

Heartfelt gratitude is due to Maile Melkonian for her tireless work copy editing a rough manuscript under a tight deadline.

I would also like to thank Mr. Mark Nahabedian, without whose generosity the Second Edition of this book would not have seen the light of day.

It should be clear, of course, that any errors that may remain in this text—despite careful work—are not the responsibility of the above individuals.

I regret that Monte did not have the satisfaction of seeing the Second Edition of this book in print. Those of us who knew Monte and loved him, however, can find some consolation in the knowledge that a generation yet unborn may benefit from his writings and the example of his life.

Markar Melkonian  
(Chicago, September 3, 1993)

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION (with minor revisions)

Prior to his arrest in Paris on November 28, 1985, Monte Melkonian was collaborating with other Armenian militants in a project to compile what would have amounted to a first-draft manifesto for a new political organization. This organization—to be called the Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement (A.P.L.M.)—intended to unite various groups and institutions throughout the diaspora into one force aimed against the Turkish state. Most of the texts included here were part of the first step in developing the strategic and ideological orientation of this new organization.

Unfortunately, Melkonian's arrest by the French secret police (the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, or D.S.T.) interrupted this work. The day he was apprehended, the D.S.T. also arrested two other members of the Armenian community in France: Benjamin Kechichian, a journalist for the Paris publication *Hay Baykar*, and Zepur Kasparian, a Syrian-born school teacher. Mr. Kechichian, who was conducting an interview with Melkonian at the time of the arrest, was released after four months of detention; while Ms. Kasparian, who was accused of providing Melkonian's lodgings in Paris, was imprisoned for one year. All three received support from the Armenian community in France and were assisted by the Comité de Soutien aux Prisonniers Politiques Arméniens (C.S.P.P.A.).

After his arrest, Melkonian was sentenced to six years in prison, and spent over three years in two French prisons, Fresnes and Poissy. Much of this time was passed in solitary confinement and total isolation. In addition to the usual rigors of the French prison system, he endured special harassment as a political prisoner. Informers monitored his every move; prison authorities restricted, delayed and confiscated reading material and correspondence; available reading light was poor; and, when he was finally released into the larger prison population after months of solitary confinement, he was forced to transfer frequently from cell to cell. He went on hunger strike more than once to protest the worst abuses and won concessions by doing so. Throughout his ordeal, he insisted that he was a political prisoner and continued writing. As a result of his confrontations with penal authorities, he earned a reputation for steadfastness, especially among his fellow Middle Eastern prisoners.

The officially propagated excuse for Melkonian's arrest was, in part, that he had entered France illegally and was in the process of planning to sink a Turkish munitions ship in the port of Marseilles. After a thorough search of the apartment where he stayed, however, the prosecution could not produce evidence of the explosive materials to be used in this plot. Nevertheless, they claimed to have discovered electronic components



which were to be used for remote detonation.

In spite of the prosecution's best efforts, Melkonian was not convicted of plotting to sink the ship. Instead, he was convicted of entering France illegally and possessing a falsified U.S. passport and an illegal handgun. For these offenses he was sentenced to nearly four years in prison and expulsion from France.

The events leading up to the arrests were complex and cannot be detailed here. However, one or two points should be mentioned: Melkonian's trial took place at the time of a month-long campaign of bombings in Paris. This campaign claimed the lives of over ten civilians and wounded over 160. Supposedly conducted by a "Committee for Solidarity with Arab and Middle Eastern Political Prisoners," the bombings were reportedly part of an attempt to gain the release of three men in French prisons, George Ibrahim Abdallah, Anis Naccache and Varoujan Garbidjian. (In his less-than-reliable syndicated column which appeared on October 29, 1986, Jack Anderson noted the inclusion of an Armenian on this list and concluded that the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), a group from which Melkonian split years earlier, was in fact responsible for the deadly bombing campaign.)

Meanwhile, French politicians were on the campaign trail. Faced with upcoming municipal and presidential elections, contenders for public office felt obliged to strike grandiloquent "anti-terrorist" postures. All of this made for a heady climate in which to try an alleged "Middle Eastern terrorist"—whether the accused man was guilty or not. And once he was found guilty, a stiff sentence was called for, regardless of the crime allegedly committed.

At the time of Melkonian's trial, French president Mitterrand had other things on his mind. His government was deeply incriminated in the very same sort of activity in which Melkonian was accused of having engaged. On July 10, 1985, a Portuguese journalist, Fernando Pereira, was killed when the flagship of the Greenpeace environmental group was bombed in Auckland harbor, New Zealand. Later that year, on November 4, two French army officers pleaded guilty to charges of manslaughter and arson in the bombing of the ship, *Rainbow Warrior*. As the investigation of the bombing proceeded, however, it became clear that French involvement went further than this. It was discovered, for example, that six French intelligence agents from the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (D.G.S.E.) had sneaked into New Zealand to spy on Greenpeace, and that two of these agents had done so with false Swiss passports. In September of 1985, the journal *Le Monde* confirmed that senior French officials had ordered the operation as part of a prolonged campaign against Greenpeace, which had spearheaded protests against French atomic tests at Muroroa Atoll in the South Pacific.

Furthermore, it was clearly no coincidence that the bombing had taken place at the port of a country which had recently banned nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed ships and had signed the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, as the result of a ten-year effort by New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange's Labor Party.

It should be noted that the French agents apprehended in the bombing plot were found to have (a) entered a foreign country illegally, (b) with false passports, (c) to sink a ship at harbor. Less than six months later, as details of the plot began to surface, French authorities accused Melkonian of the same offenses. The irony of the situation was not lost on many observers. In an undated communique which appeared in the March 1986 issue of the bilingual journal *Sardarabad*, the San Francisco branch of the Armenian People's Movement wrote: "In a classic case of what psychoanalysts call transference, French authorities accuse Mr. Melkonian of crimes which they, in fact, have committed."

But the similarities between the two cases end with the charges brought against the accused. The bombing charges against Melkonian were dismissed, while senior officials in the French government, by contrast, were clearly guilty of sinking the *Rainbow Warrior*. And the two French agents found guilty of the crime were whisked away, as per an arrangement with French authorities, to "serve their sentence" in comfortable accommodations on a South Pacific island. Monte Melkonian, meanwhile, was condemned to spend over three years in prisons described by inmates' rights advocates as among the most atrocious anywhere in Europe.

\* \* \*

These selections are collected from a number of sources. Two short articles were clearly written with an eye to popular agitation and propaganda. Some of the selections, however, were never intended for publication; indeed, several were originally accompanied by explicit requests not to be published. Other selections included in this volume were simply part of Melkonian's extensive personal correspondence, while one or two selections were intended to be circulated as "internal documents" only among a small number of militants involved in ongoing discussions of the Armenian national question.

Melkonian's audience is first and foremost Armenian militants and their Turkish and Kurdish comrades. In a letter of January 10, 1987, to the editor of this volume, he wrote:

On the subject of putting together certain articles on the national question for publication, I will repeat what I have said earlier: Such a publication could be useful to dissemi-



nate a better understanding of our people's situation, both to Armenian and non-Armenian audiences. What I think is essential in such a publication is to present ideas and information—not to blow the horn of this or that personality. I say this because you mentioned only things I have written. In my opinion, a worthwhile presentation would have to include collectively written texts and writings by other comrades. A general text could be useful in speeding the arrival of the day when work on our political manifesto and program has been completed.

I suspect that the reader will discover that I have not been entirely successful at omitting redundant passages from one text to another. For this I apologize, as for all other editorial shortcomings.

Editor  
(*Amherst, Massachusetts, March 21, 1990*)

## Chapter One ON METHODOLOGY



*This article is reprinted from the July-August, 1981 issue of ASALA's official journal, Hayastan, published in Beirut. Like most of the contributions included in that publication, this one was unsigned. As one could guess from both the prose style and the content, however, it was written by Melkonian.*

*This article shows the influence of research he undertook in 1977 in connection with his graduating thesis from the University of California at Berkeley on the subject of the rock cut tombs of Urartuan royalty. Three points emphasized here remained relevant to Monte's lifelong approach to the national question: (1) his observation that Armenians were constituted as a people native to eastern Anatolia; (2) his repudiation of all genetic or racial theories of national origin; and (3) his view that "culture," broadly defined, is central to Armenian national identity.*

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### OUR ORIGINS: TRUE AND FALSE

This article is not an attempt to justify our present struggle by invoking ancient history. The fact that Armenians were constituted as a people in their homeland over the course of several thousand years does not in itself say very much about the political demands that we are advancing today. Nevertheless, the archaeological and historiographic record refutes racist Turkish propaganda to the effect that Armenian presence in the region is much more recent. So at the risk of sounding irrelevant, our chronology will begin in prehistory.

Because very little archaeological work has been undertaken in eastern Anatolia, we do not know much about the region's earliest inhabitants. We do know that human beings have been present there for hundreds of thousands of years, though. As elsewhere, human societies in the region made a transition from hunting-and-gathering economies to economies based on cultivation and animal husbandry. Architecture, religion and other forms of cultural expression developed apace with the division of labor and the increased forces of production.

We also know that as early as the thirteenth century B.C. the area was populated by a number of tribes which remained more or less isolated from each other. The Assyrians referred to this area as *Uruatri* when the Assyrian king mounted a campaign in the region to secure metals essential to his empire. The unorganized hill tribes of *Uruatri* were no match for the mighty Assyrian Empire. Having no use for the indigenous people they encountered, the Assyrians massacred the population and destroyed their means of subsistence by cutting down their trees and vines. In response to years of such destruction the various tribes of *Uruatri* united under a single king. As a



result of this political unification an effective resistance was mustered against the ruthless Assyrian army in the ninth century B.C.

Failing to differentiate between political, tribal and geographic terms, the Assyrians referred to the new political entity formed by the merger of the hill tribes as "Urartu." The inhabitants of the region, on the other hand, referred to themselves as "the Tribes of Nairi," or "the Tribes of Bianili." It is interesting to note that the word "Van" came from "Bianili." Eventually, the tribal confederation's capital city, which was first called *Tushpa*, came to be known as Van. With the capital and ruling family at Tushpa, the basic administrative language of the confederation became the language of that city, which was Urartuan. This language was unrelated to Semitic, Indo-European, Altaic or any other family of languages spoken by neighboring peoples. Apart from Urartuan, little is known of the languages spoken in the tribal confederation.

There existed within Urartu two regions of special interest to us: *Urme* (or *Arme*) and *Hayasa*. These regions were located on the northern and western extremities of the confederation. The obvious proximity of the words *Urme*/Armenian and *Hayasa*/Hai (the Armenian-language term for the Armenian people) suggests that these regions were the original home of the people who would later become known as Armenians. Unfortunately, archaeological work to date has not uncovered decisive evidence concerning the various tribes. To make matters even more obscure, the tribes of *Urme* and *Hayasa* in particular have been neglected because of their distance from the "main flow" of imperial history, which was then located between the Assyrian and Urartuan capitals.

During the seventh century B.C., major changes took place. By then horse-riding nomadic tribes bringing traditions from Central Asia began their penetration of both Urartu and Assyria. The mobility provided by their horses made their assaults forceful and lethal. Eventually these invaders brought about the downfall of both the Assyrians and the Urartuans. By 585 B.C. both had been defeated. The victorious horsemen looted the countryside, burned the cities and killed everyone within their reach. This, coupled with the subsequent onward push and partial assimilation of the nomadic tribes, left Urartu relatively underpopulated.

It was not until after the dissolution of the tribal confederation that reference to "Armenia" began. In the early fifth century B.C. references to the Achaemenid Armenian Satrapy were engraved as part of the monumental text of Behistun. "Armenia" was incorporated into the Persian Empire in the early years of Achaemenid rule (from 560 B.C. on). At that time Armenia was ruled locally by a monarch subordinate to the Persian King. The probable reason for the rapid establishment of an Armenian monarchy on the ruins of Urartu was the need for an indigenous governing authority

answerable to the king in Parsagadae. Since the tribes of *Urme* and *Hayasa* were the furthest removed from the main assaults of the nomads, they were also the least affected by the defeat of their Urartuan allies. And this in turn made them the most available population for the Persian king to dominate.

Archaeological evidence confirms the continuity of the populations of Urartu and Armenia and discounts the "Indo-European invasion theory." Not only is there no evidence for a substantial influx of nonindigenous peoples, but among these populations there was evidently a great deal of continuity in architecture, art, clothing, pottery, etc. All of this suggests that the "Armenian" people were originally incorporated into the tribal confederation. Just as the Urartuans derived their name from their land, the Armenian (or *Hai*) people derived their name from their own region of origin.

Over the centuries, the Armenian people developed as a distinct cultural entity. A key post on east-west trade routes, Armenia was conquered by competing empires representing different religions, languages and cultures. Armenian culture was stimulated by exposure to diverse cultural developments from Asia, North Africa and the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, a great deal of intermarriage took place with peoples from as far away as China, India, Egypt and Rome. The physical variety among Armenians today is a result of this intermarriage. Armenian culture, on the other hand, developed into something clearly distinguishable from neighboring peoples. In centuries past, as today, culture rather than genetic lineage has come to define the Armenian people, the Armenian nation.

At this point, some readers may ask: If all this is so, then why do so many people and books claim that Armenians are "Indo-Europeans"? To answer this, we must turn our attention to more recent history. But first let it be noted that the term "Indo-European" is a *linguistic* term, and only a linguistic term. It has only been given "racial" connotations by unscrupulous authors and politically-inspired propagandists. Comparative linguists in the "West" have long acknowledged that Sanskrit far predates any contemporary European language. However, when it began to dawn on British scholars of the colonial period that there were linguistic ties between Hindi and European languages, they dropped the idea of a racial-linguistic relation. Any insinuation of a racial relationship between proper British gentlemen and their dark-complexioned colonial subjects was just too much for the former to take—and just enough to put linguistic ties into proper theoretical perspective.

It is true that the Armenian language has been located at the end of a branch of the family tree of Indo-European languages. However, this fact alone sheds no light on the origins of the Armenian people. As explained above, material evidence suggests indigenous eastern Anatolian origins for the



Armenian people. Although the reasons why these indigenous people adopted an Indo-European language remain obscure, one thing is clear and bears repeating: no racial connotations can be applied to the use of a language.

We might gain an insight into why some Armenian intellectuals came to accept the notion of an Indo-European "race" by taking a quick glance at the ideological milieu within which this "theory" gained currency. Most of the literature that propagates this notion was either written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or refers to sources written at that time. At the turn of the century, of course, the Armenian people were subject to extremely heavy oppression by the Ottoman sultan. Entertaining tragically misguided hopes of being aided by the European powers, some inexperienced and naive Armenian leaders embraced a very regrettable strategy—one which even more regrettably has not been abandoned to this day: they attempted to enlist the imperialist powers to intervene on behalf of the Armenians. Now if they were to intervene on the side of Armenians, they would have to have some reason to do so, some common ground. In an almost pathetic attempt to establish such a common ground, some Armenian intellectuals pulled religion and linguistics out of their hat. They argued that the Armenian people had a religious affinity with Europe (although Armenian monophysite Christian doctrine and the Gregorian Church are obviously quite different from European forms of Christianity), and that Armenians spoke a language related to those of the Great Powers. From there they argued that Armenians were long-lost European brothers (the "Indo-European invasion" hypothesis) who were in need of fraternal assistance from the "civilized world."

Well, subsequent events—and one and one-half million martyrs—show how convincing this line of argument was for our "Indo-European brothers." Lamentably, the only people who have been fooled by these appeals to foreign powers have been Armenians.

The time to repudiate these discredited ideas is long overdue. There exists no Armenian "race." There is only an Armenian people, an Armenian nation. This is why we need to fight. The Armenian people in the diaspora are losing their identity as a cultural-national entity, succumbing to the centrifugal effects of cultural assimilation. If Armenians of the diaspora do not claim their right to live in their homeland they will gradually lose their common cultural identity. And if this happens, the white massacre of our nation will have succeeded.

*Despite harassment by censors and penal authorities, as well as the generally deplorable conditions within French prisons, Melkonian managed for over three years of incarceration to carry on a discussion of the national question with a number of comrades. This letter, dated February 23, 1987, was posted from Fresnes Prison, near Paris. It was written to the editor of the London-based publication, Kaytzer, evidently in response to an article by Harootiun Kevork, a political prisoner in Canada.*

## METHODOLOGY FOR CONSIDERING THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE ARMENIAN HOMELAND

Dear Comrades,

I recently read with interest the "Letter from Prison" in your issue no. 84-85. That letter was in Armenian, but I will respond in English, since the French Ministry of "Justice" withholds all incoming and outgoing mail in our language.

Although in general I found myself agreeing with the author of the letter, I noticed a couple of points which call for clarification. All I want to do here is briefly to set the record straight, so that future discussions will be based on more precise references.

The first point in question concerns the reference to "Western Armenia" as defined according to Wilsonian frontiers. For a number of reasons, the fanciful map of Armenia drawn up by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson and the frontiers mentioned in the ill-fated Treaty of Sevres still feature prominently in the fairy tales we tell our children in diaspora. Let us consider for a moment the nature of these frontiers.

As we all know, at the end of World War I and after the dissolution of the confederation between Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, a weak, formally independent Armenian Republic was proclaimed. During its brief existence from 1918 to 1920, the frontiers of this republic varied in proportion to the balance of military power (actually, the massive *imbalance* of power) between it and Ataturk's ever-expanding Turkish nationalist forces (as well as the forces of Georgia and Azerbaijan). Nevertheless, the imperialist powers which had won the war considered the Republic of Armenia—since it already existed—to be one more factor to be taken into account as they tried to impose their own colonial and imperialist interests on the region. Just as France, Italy and Britain were haggling over which parts of the Ottoman Empire they would each control, so too the imperialist powers were trying to decide what kind of Armenia *they* wanted. It was in this context that Wilson was asked to draw up a map.



The Treaty of Sevres (which, by the way, was not even ratified!) reflected little more than provisional colonialist designs in the region in 1920. True to form, the colonialists either ignored the wishes of the indigenous populations (Armenians, Kurds, Turks and others), or they simply equated the wishes of the broad masses of Armenians, Kurds and Turks with the interests of their domestic ruling elites. The result was a map no less grotesque than other maps drawn up by colonialists through the centuries. Thus, for example, Wilson included within his proposed Armenian state a large strip of Black Sea coast. These coastal areas, however, have never been a part of our homeland. Never, throughout our three thousand years of history. They were not even included in Dikran the Great's huge empire. As for the other stretches of Wilson's "Armenia," they may constitute a rough limit to what our historic homeland is, but a more precise approximate limit could be drawn.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is our duty (the duty of progressive Armenians) to study the historical, cultural, national and demographic situation up until 1915, so as to define the approximate frontiers of our historic homeland ourselves. We do not need U.S. presidents to tell us where our homeland is. And even if they try to do so, we should not subordinate our better judgment to their economic, strategic or political agenda.

In any case, by continuing to invoke Wilson's map and the Treaty of Sevres we are in fact promoting an unjust notion of our homeland. And this is neither realistic nor in any way conducive to an equitable understanding with other people in the region. Even worse, to do so is to propagate the historically disastrous notion that the best interests of the Armenian people are better defined and "guaranteed" by imperialist governments than by the Armenian people themselves.

My second comment on your letter concerns the following statement: "And even if all diaspora Armenians without exception return to Western Armenia they will constitute a small minority of the total population."

Well, it just is not true that all diasporan Armenians would constitute a small minority in the regions of our historic homeland now in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In those regions there is currently a total population of 3,600,000 (according to Turkish government figures—which in this case are internationally recognized to be more or less accurate). Because the Turkish government refuses to acknowledge the existence (much less the national rights) of non-Turkish nationalities within its borders, statistics on the exact breakdown into national groups is difficult. However, an educated estimate would count approximately 2,200,000 Kurds, 1,300,000 Turks and 100,000 miscellaneous minorities, including a handful of Armenians. In passing, let us add that the annual rate of population increase in the region is 2.8% (as opposed to approximately 2.5% for Turkey as a whole).

Now, in the Soviet diaspora (that is, in all parts of the U.S.S.R. outside of Soviet Armenia, Akhalkalak, Karabagh and Nakhichevan) there are currently over one million persons of Armenian origin. Meanwhile, in the non-Soviet diaspora the number of persons of Armenian origin (including the most assimilated among them) is around two million (700,000+ in the U.S., Canada and Mexico; 300,000 in France; 150,000 in Iran, 150,000 in Lebanon, 80,000 in Turkey, etc.). (Elsewhere, I have argued that in principle persons of Armenian origin in the Soviet diaspora have as much right as those in the non-Soviet diaspora to live in the part of our homeland now within the borders of Turkey.)<sup>3</sup>

Thus, if all Armenians of the diaspora without exception were to move to our homeland in Turkey, they would constitute not a slight minority, but a clear relative majority. Indeed, even if only those in the non-Soviet diaspora were all to make the move, the number of Armenians would almost equal the number of Kurds currently in the region. Of course, the hitch is that both subjective and objective factors throughout the diaspora make it safe to say that only a rather small number of diaspora Armenians will ever relocate to our homeland now in Turkey. And this fact makes the general assertion that Armenians will constitute only a small minority in those regions a strong probability.

However, there is one more aspect of the problem that we should not ignore. Soviet Armenia and the U.S.S.R. in general are both quantitatively and qualitatively more important than the diaspora. Under current conditions, a Soviet initiative is not likely—and it may not even be advisable.<sup>4</sup> For this and other reasons, we realize that our struggle must be built by Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora. Nevertheless, we do not have the right to entirely discount the possibility that at some time in the future the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic might take a more self-assertive position on this question.

And let us not forget another fact: about half of Soviet Armenia's Armenian population can trace its origin to the other side of the border. The borders established by force during Ataturk's expansionist offensives and maintained since then only by reactionary Turkish and NATO armies are by no means criteria to be respected by any progressive force whatsoever, whether it be Armenian, Turkish, Kurdish or whatever. Regions of our historic homeland now in Turkey could be integrated into a modified, regionally expanded Armenian S.S.R., while retaining Armenian demographic dominance. (It should go without saying that this demographic dominance should by no means translate into exclusive political, economic or cultural dominance.)

Second, we should not dismiss offhand the possibility that at least certain portions of the non-Armenian population in the region might prefer to integrate themselves into this new Armenian S.S.R. It may seem unlikely that



great numbers of them would choose such an option, but for various reasons certain numbers of them may very well prefer to rebuild the region's economy within the framework of Soviet Armenia. (I do not mean to be overly optimistic. My point is just that at this point we cannot totally discount territorial adjustments.)

I applaud your attempt to define a minimum goal for our struggle. This is a task we can do today, and we ought to tackle it. But it would be unwarranted to hold this goal to be the only permissible solution. For some time now, other comrades and I have engaged in a study of our current situation, including demographic realities, as well as political, military, strategic and economic realities. From this study we can draw two conclusions: (1) The eventual form of the solution to our national question will be determined by the final outcome of the coming conflict with the Turkish state; and (2) The coming conflict with the Turkish state will follow a trajectory which it is next to impossible to foretell at the present time.

Your comrade,  
Monte

*What follows is Melkonian's response to an article which appeared in the July 1987 issue of the San Francisco-based journal, Sardarabad. The article, dated September 3, 1987, was written from Poissy Prison.*

*At the date of this writing Monte seems to have dismissed the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan as a subject of much concern. As we know, however, a series of events in the Armenian S.S.R. since January of 1988 resuscitated this slogan, led to de facto Armenian secession from the U.S.S.R. and ultimately contributed to the destruction of the Soviet state. This series of events included: the decision by the Karabagh Council of People's Deputies to call for affiliation of that region with Soviet Armenia; the mass demonstrations and strikes in Yerevan in solidarity with this decision; the counterdemonstrations in Baku and the massacre of Armenians in Sumgait; the December 1988 earthquake which destroyed hundreds of villages and took between 25,000 and 100,000 lives; the timidity and procrastination of the All-Union Party, which failed to take decisive action on the question of Karabagh during its Nineteenth Party Congress in the fall of 1989; the emergence of the nationalist Azerbaijani Popular Front and the massacre and expulsion of Armenians from Baku in January of 1990, which led to the introduction of troops and renewed calls for Azeri secession from the U.S.S.R.; Armenian abstention from the March 1991 referendum on the future of the Soviet Union; the August 1991 coup, and Yeltsin's counter coup against the Soviet constitution.*

*Even after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., there is no evidence to indicate that Monte ever changed his view, expressed below, that independence from the Soviet Union could very well spell tragedy for Armenia. Judging from his personal correspondence, however, by late 1990 he had resigned himself to the impending collapse of the U.S.S.R. He then focused all of his energy on Karabagh, the fate of which he believed to be crucial to Armenia's future in a new and much more dangerous era.*

### MELKONIAN RESPONDS TO BAGDASSARIAN

Dear Comrades,

I would like to make a couple of comments about Greg Bagdassarian's article entitled "Reconsidering the Armenian Question," which appeared in the last issue of *Sardarabad*. Before entering into details, however, let me repeat what I have written to other comrades: In order to successfully pursue our goal, we must closely study our situation in all of its aspects. Speaking schematically, the proper scientific methodology must systematically iden-



tify each important aspect of a totality and analyze each totality into its elements; it must help us to grasp each element in reciprocal interaction with all other elements, and it must remind us to view all phenomena as processes, in their movement and transformation.

This is a tall order to fill, but the consequences of taking shortcuts in our methodology can accumulate and lead to disaster. By omitting one or another element in an analysis, for example, we run the risk of arriving at seemingly reasonable conclusions which nevertheless may not accurately represent reality. Because inaccurate analyses lead to failure in the field, the old maxim is indeed true: There is nothing more practical than the right theory.

Now, I would like to comment on what I believe to be problems in the article, taking them up in the order in which they appear in the original text, rather than their order of importance.

The first problem the author of the article mentioned was the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan. This is a rather straightforward issue to sift through. In fact, it is likely that most Armenian progressives no longer even consider this to be a serious subject for debate. First, we should clearly define the term "Free, Independent (and one might add "United") Armenia." What could this mean, politically, economically or demographically?

In the absence of a clear, coherent definition from proponents of this slogan, let us consider a couple of hypotheses. The word "Free" may possibly refer to the "free market" of capitalism. If this is the case, the "liberation struggle" would not merit the name, since its goal would leave the majority of Armenians unliberated from capitalist exploitation. On the other hand, "Free" may refer to the foundation of a state system which is not structurally connected to any state system outside of the regions of our homeland. In this case, the word "Free" would seem to be a mere repetition of the word "Independent"—at least as far as "independence" is generally understood vis-a-vis state structures.

But does an "independent" state necessarily guarantee genuine national independence? The examples of many formally independent states in Asia, Africa and Latin America attest to the fact that, in this day and age, formal independent statehood may have nothing at all to do with true independence. In fact, in this period of neocolonial domination, formal independence may in some cases even conflict with the ability of a people or nation as a whole to determine their own interests and pursue those interests. The political independence of the Confederacy from the United States of America, for example, would not have been in the best interests of either the Black population of the southern states, or even of many southern Whites. Nor does political independence guarantee that a country will have a free hand in the spheres of either foreign or domestic policy. Just how "independent,"

one might ask, are Haiti, Honduras or even Canada? True independence can only be achieved through economic independence. In the present situation of global economic interdependence, however, the very notion of political independence must be relativized.

Let us now reflect on the word "Armenia" in the slogan. If we read the literature of proponents of the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan, and if we review their maps, we are led to believe that they define the geographical limits of our homeland as those drawn by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson. But these borders were drawn according to imperialist calculations of what sort of "Armenia" would best serve their own strategic interests. Needless to say, the incumbent populations of the area were never consulted as to their wishes. Thus, from the position of the Armenian people themselves, the borders of Wilson's "Armenia" were grossly indefensible—morally and militarily. The entire scheme was doomed to failure at the outset, and as it failed, the result was even more destruction for what remained of the Armenian nation. Wilson's "Armenia" was a travesty which, in any case, is entirely irrelevant to the present and future realities of the region.

For some time now, Armenian progressives have generally recognized that the struggle should aim to liberate our people, not a plot of land. Of course, the relationship of a people to their homeland is crucial. A people will naturally have a difficult time maintaining a common cultural identity without a collective presence in their homeland. Only in its homeland can a people develop economically, culturally and socially as a homogeneous entity. In fact, this is the crux of why some of us consider it necessary to struggle to live in our homeland.

It should be noted, however, that establishing the presence of our people in our homeland does not automatically necessitate an independent Armenian state apparatus. Nor is the establishment of such an apparatus necessarily the highest expression of national self-determination. As I mentioned earlier, national development and the true interests of any people depend more on economic potential than on formal state independence. This has become clearer and clearer with the advance of industrialization and the global interdependence of national economies. Only when an independent state structure can better serve (or at least not hinder) the economic, social and cultural development of a population should it be considered a higher form of self-determination.

In view of these observations, let us ask ourselves whether in principle a "Free, Independent Armenia" is a realistic goal that would serve the interests of the Armenian people in the long run. As we seek an answer to this question, we should keep in mind that realism is a guiding principle for revolutionaries. Before advancing a political slogan, one should first pose the question: Is it realizable? If it is not, then it should not be adopted.



We might begin by considering the case of Soviet Armenia. As a point of departure, let us consider how the Armenian S.S.R. fits into the U.S.S.R. A truly satisfactory account of this relationship would require much more time and access to research materials than I have at present. So for the present, we will have to limit our discussion to a few obvious remarks:

The U.S.S.R. was originally conceived of as a union of distinct nations which retain their own regional and republican state structures. In order to facilitate economic and social development—as well as military defense—these regional and republican state structures are supposed to have been integrated into a collectively organized overall state structure. Thus, according to this account, participation in such a union should serve the material interests of the people concerned. And in point of fact, economic cooperation among the regions and peoples of the U.S.S.R. has produced the material basis to secure social and cultural needs.

Of course, many of the goals of the founders of the Soviet Union have been thwarted by subsequent Soviet leaders. This has led both to the present economic crisis and the accumulation of acute social and national problems.

Despite the enormous difficulties of the past, however—difficulties that include imperialist blockade, invasion by foreign armies, civil war and a very costly struggle against fascism—today the Soviet Union arguably enjoys the world's third largest economy (depending on the indices used for assessment). And credit should go where credit is due: the economic achievements of the Soviet Union have proceeded thanks to reliance on domestic Soviet human and material resources, rather than on the exploitation of foreign labor, resources and markets, as is the case with imperialist economies. Furthermore, the Soviet Union has great human and natural resources—a potential which, when developed in the future, could place it before all others.

In the case of the Armenian S.S.R., the advantages of membership in the U.S.S.R. have been especially evident. Most informed Armenians, I think, would admit that without the protection of the Red Army what remained of the Armenian nation in 1920 would have been annihilated by Turkish nationalist forces. Likewise, Armenia's inclusion in the U.S.S.R. forced Nazi-leaning Turkey to balk on its invasion plans in 1941-42. And today, thanks to the defensive potential of the Red Army, Turkey cannot further violate the territory of Soviet Armenia, as it does in relation to Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

This military protection alone should be sufficient to demonstrate the necessity of Armenian membership in the U.S.S.R. Consequently, from the perspective of the physical security of our people, patriotic Armenians should defend our homeland's inclusion in the Soviet Union. Moreover, in

my opinion they should do so as a matter of principle and not—as those torn between cynicism and romanticism would have it—as a “necessary evil.” For us there are certain considerations which are almost as important as considerations of physical security. Sooner or later there will be a socialist revolution in Turkey. The success of that revolution will secure Soviet Armenia from the threat of conventional military aggression over the border. The question facing Armenia at that time will be whether or not the economic development of our homeland (which produces the material basis for greater social and cultural development) is enhanced by its republican status in the Soviet Union.

I do not have the space to go into details here. However, it should be clear from a review of the past seventy years of development, as well as from a close look at the future economic potential of both Soviet Armenia and the Soviet Union, that republican membership in the U.S.S.R. will remain very much in the best interests of the Armenian people.

Our homeland is our homeland, and patriotic Armenians will love it as such. Indeed, those regions within the U.S.S.R., as well as those currently within the borders of the Turkish state, have great natural beauty. Nevertheless, we must face the fact that the economic potential of the land is relatively limited. True, there are mineral resources, but these are available in restricted quantities and most of them are not of precious market value. Furthermore, in proportion to the total surface area, good agricultural land is not abundant. Hydroelectric potential is considerable, forestry products are available, and tourism could be developed. Nevertheless, when we consider that Soviet Armenia is more densely populated than four out of five countries on earth, the relatively modest domestic economic potential is placed in sober perspective.

The inclusion of part of our homeland within the Soviet Union saved our people from famines and epidemics and guaranteed the conditions of peace necessary for Armenians to develop their own resources. Furthermore, membership in the U.S.S.R. catapulted Armenia beyond the limits of its domestic resources. The economic policies of the U.S.S.R. have allowed Armenians to develop advanced and diversified industries, to guarantee the supply of needed materials and to gain quick access to new technologies. As an integral part of the vast All-Union economy, our nation has gained the means to accelerate the development of Armenia's own resources, as well as to create industries that are only possible through close, efficient cooperation with other nations.

Granted, the undemocratic central command system of the U.S.S.R. up until now has also had very harmful consequences both for Soviet Armenia and the other republics. Widespread readjustments and structural political changes are needed to truly liberate the potential of Soviet citizens.



And, of course, we should not forget that Soviet Armenia has also contributed to the All-Union Soviet economy. It is true that today in particular our compatriots there face many pressing tasks. Some people, however, disparage the gains made thus far, by comparing the material wealth of average Armenians in Soviet Armenia with the present level of consumption among petty-bourgeois diasporan Armenians in imperialist countries. It might be fairer and more revealing, however, to compare life in Soviet Armenia with life just on the other side of the Soviet-Turkish border—or to compare life today with the life of our people in other periods of our national history. In so doing, it becomes clear that never before have Armenians as a nation lived so well as they do now (although if correct socialist principles had been applied they would be living much better). In spite of genocide, invasion, mass expulsion and a relative scarcity of arable land and other natural resources, the material life of our compatriots now far surpasses that of the vast majority of the populations of Iran and Turkey. Furthermore, as corrections necessary to introduce socialist practices proceed, and the authority and diversity of functions of the Union republics increases, the future promises an ever higher standard of living and greater opportunities for social and cultural expression.

To summarize: Independent statehood for Armenia would deprive Armenians of future advantages that the Soviet system could afford, while exposing the population to NATO-Turkish military aggression. The economic, political and military realities of our homeland, as well as the demographic facts, indicate decisively that any sort of independent Armenian state—even if such a thing was possible—would be against the interests of our people. Rather than self-determination, such “independence” would amount to national self-termination.

Now let us consider the case of those parts of our homeland currently within the borders of the Turkish state. In “Organizational Questions for the Diaspora” and elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> I suggested that, in view of demographic realities prevailing in Turkey, as well as the fact that only a minority of Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora are likely ever to immigrate to our homeland west of the current border—in view of these realities, we can pretty well dismiss the idea of ever creating conditions that would allow for the emergence of an Armenian state of any kind in that region, assuming that our forces are limited to those of the Armenians of the non-Soviet diaspora.

Perhaps, if we work very effectively and mobilize many of our people, we may be able to gain some sort of regional autonomy within a post-revolutionary Turkish or Kurdish state. In such a case, however, these regions would most likely be more geographically limited than the totality of our historic homeland now in Turkey. They would also be totally dependent on economic integration into the new revolutionary socialist state of the region. This, it seems to me, is so obvious that it is not worth harping on.

If, however, the Armenian S.S.R. were to take an initiative vis-a-vis our homeland in Turkey, demographic and political factors could drastically change, making possible the integration of at least certain regions into a new, larger Soviet Armenia. But even if such regions were integrated into Soviet Armenia, little would be changed as far as the economic interests of the population are concerned. In fact, in view of the economic exploitation, relative lack of infrastructure, primitive living conditions and probable widespread damage incurred during the course of the coming liberation war, it is very likely that the inhabitants of the new Armenian S.S.R. would have everything to gain from continued republican membership in the Soviet Union. This is becoming clearer and clearer, with the increasing interdependence and internationalization of regional and national economies in the “West” as well as the “East.”

Before proceeding with the discussion, I would like to note a good point that Greg made: Our opposition to the slogan “Free, Independent Armenia” should proceed from the fact that it is a *debilitating illusion*. Far too many sincere and initially energetic patriots have eventually come to feel betrayed by leaders who have lead them on a wild goose chase with this slogan. Advocates of “Free, independent Armenia” and other pipe dreams have been responsible for demoralizing our ranks and wasting precious time.

Now, as to the notion of self-determination and how it applies to the Armenian case, I will summarize views which have been presented elsewhere<sup>6</sup>: the right to *self-determination* refers to the right of a given population (usually a nation) to create its own future more or less free from external coercion, but within the limits of the historical realities with which it is faced. It should be noted that this conception of self-determination differs in important respects from Greg’s narrower conception, according to which a nation cannot exercise self-determination unless it is in a position to achieve independent statehood. According to my view, the Assyrian people, for instance, *can* and should practice self-determination, even though it is unrealistic to envisage an independent Assyrian state. According to Greg’s version of self-determination, however, this would not be the case.

I found myself disagreeing with Greg most strongly, however, when I came to page eight of his article. Referring to the call to reintegrate certain regions of the Armenian homeland currently in Turkey into Soviet Armenia, Greg claims that such a demand would be no less a breach of the principle of self-determination than would the “Free, Independent Armenia” scheme. He does try to balance his view somewhat by commenting in a footnote to the effect that to accept a status quo which resulted from genocide and mass expulsion “would be as condemnable as to eternalize the ‘new facts’ that the Zionists created in Palestine.” Nevertheless, it is clear that Greg tends to



consider the post-1920 status quo to be rather immutable, at least as concerns the general demographic makeup of the region and the possibility of future territorial modifications.

Even his comments which were meant to differentiate the Palestinian and Armenian cases do not really support his point. I would prefer to avoid a lengthy discussion of the Palestinian case here, but the comparison cannot be escaped. Greg attempts to contrast the Armenian and Palestinian cases by noting that: "The Palestinians constitute a substantial national presence on the land in question." Let us consider this example a bit more closely. In the West Bank and Gaza (the only areas which reactionary circles and liberal Zionists consider to be in question), the Palestinian people comprise nearly the whole of the population. Within the pre-1967 borders, on the other hand, Palestinians constitute a minority of the total population. If we define the Palestinian homeland as the territories annexed in 1948, plus the West Bank and the Gaza, then we see that the Palestinians constitute almost half the population. However, it is only because the Zionists annexed the West Bank and the Gaza that such a high proportion of Palestinians currently live under Zionist domination. Once you accept the practice of chopping up someone else's homeland to suit your own purposes, you can readily justify Zionist claims that most of Palestine should never be included within a Palestinian state. When you look at Palestine as a whole, however, that picture changes. Even if only the West Bank and the Gaza were some day to become an independent Palestinian state, that would not illegitimize the Palestinian people's right to live in other parts of their homeland.

Evidently, Greg agrees with this view when he writes: "Palestinians in the diaspora should be allowed to return to their lands in all parts of Palestine." Nevertheless, he *implies* something quite different when he writes: "The Palestinians do not have a Soviet Socialist Republic to call their own." Surely Greg does not wish to claim that Armenians would somehow have a greater right to inhabit their homeland if Turkey were to invade Soviet Armenia! Yet this would seem to follow from his reasoning.

Accordingly, I submit that the Turkey-Armenia status quo is no more acceptable than the "Israel"/Palestine status quo. Just as the whole of Palestine is "the land in question" for the Palestinians, so too the whole Armenian homeland is "the land in question" for Armenians. Just as the Palestinian people constitute the vast majority of the population in the West Bank and Gaza, so too the Armenian people constitute the vast majority of the population in Soviet Armenia. Just as the Palestinian people on the land and in diaspora could one day easily comprise at least half the population of the whole of Palestine, so too could the Armenian people comprise at least a plurality throughout the whole of the Armenian homeland. (Elsewhere, I have argued that the reunification of at least certain parts of "Western

Armenia" with Soviet Armenia could be demographically—as well as historically—justified.)<sup>7</sup>

The "advantage" for the Palestinians is that they have relatively more of their people in Zionist-controlled parts of their homeland than we do in the Turkish chauvinist-controlled parts of our homeland. Our "advantage," however, is precisely that very same Armenian S.S.R., the existence of which Greg takes as compromising Armenian claims to "Western Armenia." Let us not forget that Soviet Armenia is a part of the U.S.S.R., and that the Armenian population in the Soviet Union alone almost equals the world's total Palestinian population. As a member republic of the U.S.S.R., Soviet Armenia's economic, political and military potential dwarfs the entire potential of the Palestinian people today. As Greg himself points out, "rights" have little to do with the real world, until they are "pursued or exercised through actual political activity." Even ignoring the non-Soviet diaspora, it should be clear that Soviet Armenia could, under the right circumstances, potentially secure Armenian rights in "Western Armenia."

Here I should make an important point that I have already touched on in other letters and articles: when one talks about the Armenian people in general, one should recognize that one is referring primarily to the Armenian elements in the U.S.S.R. (4.5 million of the almost 6.5 million Armenian elements in the world), and in particular, to the Armenians in Soviet Armenia (who constitute about half of all Armenians living). Democratic principles are important. When Greg wrote that "Our first responsibility, if we are serious, is to assess our current situation, and on that basis to set for ourselves political goals which we soberly judge to be realistic. Only then can we know what rights we should fight for," the following question arises: Who is this "we" to whom Greg refers? Does he mean to refer to Armenians in general, all of "them"? Or Armenian elements of the non-Soviet diaspora? Progressive elements of the non-Soviet diaspora? I think a confusion arises from the possibility that he means different things with different uses of the word "we." When he mentions the "rights we should fight for" he is probably referring to progressive Armenian elements of the non-Soviet diaspora, but I cannot make out the referent of the possessive pronoun in his phrase "our current situation." Is it the Armenian people in general, or the Armenian elements of the non-Soviet diaspora? To clearly understand our situation, we should consider the Armenian people, both *as a whole* and as the many components making up that whole. Since the Armenian question belongs at least as much (and probably more) to our compatriots in the U.S.S.R. as to non-Soviet diasporan Armenians, we should not be so arrogant as to overlook them, ignore the possible initiatives or decisions they may make or count them out of our assessment of the situation. After all, they are the majority, they are the ones who have set up a republic which represents our people much more than any



diasporan force ever has. Let us not forget that at least half the population of Soviet Armenia itself traces its origins to parts of our homeland now in Turkey. Nor should we forget that since 1920 the only substantial initiatives taken vis-a-vis our homeland now in Turkey have been taken by the U.S.S.R. and Soviet Armenia.<sup>8</sup> Who are we to count them out? Progressive diasporan Armenians should set political goals realistically, without confusing non-Soviet diasporan potential with overall Armenian potential.

In an effort to place the possibility of territorial modifications into perspective, Greg writes: "Regardless of what demographic changes may or may not take place in the region, it is important for us to realize that calling for the concentration of a population on a territory for the purpose of uniting that territory with a neighboring state is tantamount to calling for the 'liberation' of a land without regard to the interests or consent of the incumbent population." This statement is loaded with misconceptions. In the first clause, for instance, Greg simply dismisses future demographic changes as irrelevant to his consideration. This, quite frankly, is appalling. When we speak of demography, we should always remember that we are talking about human beings. Armenians are among those human beings who must gain their right to live within any part of their homeland they may wish to inhabit. It seems that in an effort to be "fair" to the present non-Armenian inhabitants of the region, Greg is prepared to be quite unfair to Armenians who may wish to inhabit those areas. He should reflect upon the fact that Armenians have for several generations been absent from "Western Armenia" because they were forced—through a policy of genocide—to be absent from that area.

Secondly, Greg misrepresents the motivation behind what he calls "the concentration of a population on a territory." If Armenians wish to live in "Western Armenia," this would seem to be a natural consequence of our history and continuing cultural identity. The Armenian people have an attachment to their national life. They would like to live in their homeland simply because they would like to live within the context of their own cultural and national life, and in the long run, this is not possible in diaspora.

The challenge facing us is to make it possible for our people to live in regions from which they are currently excluded. Therefore, we certainly are working to "concentrate" Armenians in the portion of Armenia currently within the borders of Turkey. This is the very crux of our struggle. It is a just and humanitarian goal, not a diabolical plot against anyone except the present Turkish state and its reactionary allies. And if, in the future, it so happened that the majority of the inhabitants of a portion of "Western Armenia" was to choose to reintegrate into Soviet Armenia, it would be absurd to claim that such a decision would be a breach of the right of nations to self-determination.

Now let us consider Greg's term, "incumbent population," with all of its loaded implications. Of course, we stand firmly against expelling anyone from any land (with the exception of incorrigibly anti-popular and fascist elements which for one reason or another have not been exterminated during wars of liberation). We call for respect of the rights and the interests of all the populations involved, including the Armenian people. In this regard, it is surprising that the term "incumbent population" should be used to differentiate between the present inhabitants of the region and the Armenians, who are an indigenous people native to the land. Any Armenians who are so attached to their land that they would relocate to it must be considered natives, with equal rights in that region.

I repeat: We must respect the rights of all on an equal basis. The decisions of the majority of those concerned will determine what is going to happen in the region. If some day this were to mean the reintegration of some or all regions into Soviet Armenia, then such an eventuality would be just as consistent with self-determination as if some day the democratic majority were to elect to integrate into a new Kurdish or Turkish state. Any position to the contrary would constitute a *de facto* acceptance of borders established through genocide and maintained through imperialist military coercion. Furthermore, any position to the contrary would imply anti-Armenian chauvinism and an arbitrary disregard for one possible democratically-mandated choice on the part of what may conceivably become a popular majority in certain parts of the region.

It is very premature today to predict the course of revolutionary change in the region. Some areas may remain within Turkey, others may be included within a Kurdish state, and others may be included into Soviet Armenia. In any case, it is almost certain that the borders of the Turkish state will be modified during or after the coming revolution. So no one—least of all progressive elements—should let Turkey's present arbitrary and temporary borders limit their vision of future possibilities.

Now, the reader may be led to believe that I have gone out of my way to paint a rosy picture of the chances of territorial reintegration into Soviet Armenia. In reality, however, I am neither "optimistic" nor do I consider the territorial issue the condition *sine qua non* for Armenian self-determination. This issue certainly should not become an obsession. I only wish to indicate that some form of territorial reunification with Soviet Armenia is not totally out of the question.

An increasing number of us have come to the conclusion that the time is long overdue for us to adopt realism as a principle. Realism entails distinguishing what is possible from what is impossible, and what is probable from what is improbable, without equating the improbable with the impossible. This requires seeing our people the way they are and realizing



exactly where we ourselves stand as progressive diasporan Armenians. So for one thing, we should resign ourselves to the fact that progressive diasporan Armenians will never represent the majority of the Armenian people—if for no other reason than simply because they are geographically isolated from Soviet Armenia. Our goals and responsibilities should be defined and pursued independently of the political possibilities of our compatriots in the U.S.S.R.; at the same time, however, our particular situation is such that we must always be careful not to contradict those possibilities.

Recognizing this, we should refrain from bombastically portraying our potential as the total potential of the Armenian people. We should avoid confusing what is unrealistic for diasporan Armenians to accomplish with what may be possible and perfectly justifiable for the Armenian S.S.R. to undertake. We should never neglect democratic principles by ignoring the will of the majority of our people in Soviet Armenia, and we should refrain from presumptuously speaking in the name of the whole Armenian people.

Let us pass on to another sticky point in the article under review. Greg writes: "Since most diasporan Armenians may, if they wish, participate in the national life of their nation by relocating to Soviet Armenia, then in what sense can Armenians in the diaspora be said to be denied self-determination?"

Again this is a loaded statement. To take a shortcut in addressing Greg's question, let me direct the reader to my discussion entitled "Why Soviet Armenia Does Not Currently Constitute a Total Response to the Armenian People's National Aspirations."<sup>9</sup> Whether or not most diasporan Armenians may relocate to the Armenian S.S.R. if they wish to, however, is not the crux of the matter. The crux, rather, is as Greg states in the next paragraph: "Armenians most certainly are justified in fighting to gain their right to live on any portion of their historic homeland, including that portion from which they were removed as a result of a systematic state policy of genocide and mass deportation." The Armenian people must have the right to live their collective national life in any part of their homeland they wish. Thus, to answer Greg's question we should respond: Armenians in diaspora are denied self-determination in most of their homeland (that is, the portion under Turkish control), and especially in those regions from which the vast majority trace their origins.

As for the Greek analogy,<sup>10</sup> I am afraid I fail to see the point. Greeks living outside of Greece may if they wish live in any part of Greece they choose. This, however, is not the case with Armenians.

Finally, let us say a few words about the Leninists of the Communist Party of Turkey (T.K.P.-L.) and its program resolution on the Armenian Question.<sup>11</sup> From what I recall of one or two of the less enthusiastic Armenian responses to the T.K.P.-L. resolution, Greg has good reason to criticize these

disparaging reactions. Nevertheless, I believe that Greg has failed to fully comprehend the vague and incomplete nature of the T.K.P.-L. position. I was especially perplexed by his statement that their position was "faultless." Granted, it is a step in the right direction, and we salute our comrades in the T.K.P.-L. and others who have arrived at similar positions vis-a-vis Armenian grievances. Nevertheless, these positions are still faulty. I agree that the Kurdish Question in Turkey is a question of national liberation with a demographic and territorial potential far beyond that of the other "minority questions" in Turkey. But many of our Turkish comrades still appear to need a better understanding of who and where the Armenians currently are. They may speak of the right of Armenians who were forced to leave their land to return, but one wonders whether they are aware that 4.5 million of the total 6.5 million Armenians are descendants of our people who were forced to leave regions now in Turkey.

I do not wish to minimize the achievement which the past resolutions represent. Nevertheless, there is much that our revolutionary comrades in Turkey have yet to understand about our situation before they draw up their next resolutions on the Armenian Question. It is unacceptable for people in Turkey who call themselves Marxist-Leninists to ignore such realities as Soviet Armenia and its population, regional realities and democratic implications arising from the significant Armenian population in the U.S.S.R. These realities demonstrate that the Armenian case cannot be reduced in an absolute sense to that of a national minority in Turkey.

Toward the end of his article Greg writes: "A just solution to the Armenian Question does not entail achieving Armenian national self-determination in eastern Anatolia." From this point, he concludes that "Strictly speaking, the Armenian struggle should not be characterized as a national liberation struggle." As we have seen, however, these assertions depend on the way one defines the terms used. What is more, they are proposed in rather absolute terms, thus any possible future role of Armenians in the Soviet Union and especially in Soviet Armenia seems to have been discarded at the outset.

Greg formulates the solution to our problem thus: "A just solution to the Armenian Question requires securing the effective right of diasporan Armenians to voluntarily reside on any portion of their ancestral lands, and to enjoy all democratic rights on that land." This thesis would have been better if he had qualified it as the only realistic possibility for the unassisted struggle of Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora. In the absence of an initiative on the part of Soviet Armenia, it is indeed probable that the Armenian national question will be resolved along the lines of a national minority problem in Turkey or Kurdistan. As we have seen, however, future initiatives on the part of that large part of the Armenian nation which resides



within the Soviet Union cannot brashly be discounted with a sweep of the pen. In the years to come, Soviet Armenians may very well decide to have their say in the resolution of the Armenian Question.

Your comrade,  
Monte

*Melkonian devoted a lot of space to defining terms that appear in discussions of the national question. The penultimate section of Chapter Three, for instance, contains short explanations of several terms commonly used by people who describe themselves as progressives, socialists or communists. If defining terms is important for political discourse in general, it is even more important for a serious consideration of the Armenian case. The text which appears below was part of a collective project undertaken by Melkonian and others to prepare material for the political program and manifesto of a projected political organization, the Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement (A.P.L.M.). The text was prepared in 1984 and significantly revised in 1988.*

*The first time a glossary term appears in the definition of another term, it is marked with an asterisk (\*). Glossary terms are also marked with an asterisk the first time each one appears in each subsequent chapter. Thus, the reader has the option of skipping this section and proceeding to subsequent chapters, while periodically referring back to the glossary if Melkonian's use of a term is uncertain.*

## DEFINITIONS

*A preliminary note:* This glossary of terms which are of special significance to the Armenian national question is the product of collective study. We have followed one main principle in compiling research material: collect as much material from as many sources as possible. Beyond this, we followed the techniques of research familiar to any university graduate student—with the difference that we have had to conduct our research secretly. Unfortunately, we currently find ourselves living under conditions of either clandestine activity or imprisonment—conditions which are not ideal for academic research. Because of this, our research has not been conducted as systematically as it should.

To make things even more difficult, the manner in which the results of this research are presented might be misleading. It would be a mistake to interpret the following definitions as neat categories of groups of people. We are opposed to the sort of methodology which begins with dry definitions and then proceeds with the investigation without considering the dynamic interactions of the referents of the terms defined. It should be kept in mind, then, that the following definitions are *analytical tools*—they merely facilitate our theoretical grasp of what in reality are integral totalities.

The theoretical shortcomings of familiar discussions is that they have been unable to consider the Armenian case systematically without grossly over-



simplifying it. In order to avoid this—while at the same time preserving the detail and precision which is indispensable for a discussion which will not lead to a repetition of the platitudes of the past—we have attempted to present the minimal categories necessary for an analysis of the Armenian national question.

### Armenian-Related Terms:

(1) *Armenian*: As a review of history shows, the word Armenian, as applied to persons, has meant different things at different times.<sup>12</sup> At times it has referred to natives of a given region or members of a particular clan; at other times it has referred to those who spoke the Armenian language, or to subjects of a ruler whose mother tongue was Armenian; At still other times it has referred to those who were associated with the Armenian Gregorian Church. Over the course of over two millennia, however, a clearly distinct Armenian culture\* emerged, entailing a distinct language, religion and traditions, and sometimes involving political and administrative aspects of culture. We will return to a discussion of culture presently, but first a few words about unsatisfactory definitions of the word Armenian.

Armenians are the product of thousands of years of voluntary and involuntary interaction with neighboring and nomadic peoples. The assimilation of other peoples, the influx of other inhabitants, foreign conquest and interactions with neighboring populations—each of these considerations helps to explain why today, despite widely recognizable “typical” traits, Armenians vary greatly in terms of physical features. For this reason, the word Armenian has no racial significance (even if, as does not seem likely, the word race itself has anything other than mythological significance).

Linguistic, religious or other isolated factors by themselves no longer accurately identify an Armenian, either. Persons born in Soviet Armenia who consider themselves to be Russians or Kurds,\* for example, should not be counted as Armenians just because their first language is Armenian. Nor should Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims or atheists be excluded from the Armenian nation solely because they are not members of the Gregorian Church.

Clearly, the term Armenian does not refer to the inhabitants of any specific region. Such a claim would fly in the face of the fact that today hundreds of thousands of Armenians reside outside the Armenian homeland\*, in dozens of countries on six continents.

As we have hinted, the word “Armenian” has come to refer to what may be called a *cultural-national entity*; accordingly, anyone who was born into

Armenian culture\*, or who has accepted it as her or his own, is assumed to be an Armenian. (Of course, an attachment to Armenian culture as a whole does not require that every Armenian be an expert on Yeghishe's writings, for example, or the music of Gomidas; it just means that his or her cultural life takes place in large part within the general domain of Armenian culture. Thus, for example, a descendant of Armenians who does not speak Armenian but who more closely identifies with Armenian culture than with any other culture—such a person ought to be counted as an Armenian.)

Until the beginning of the genocide in 1915, Armenians as a cultural-national entity resided mainly throughout the Armenian homeland and neighboring regions. As we know, however, the situation after 1915 is very different. In view of our current situation, an Armenian could be defined as anyone (a) whose ancestors have been Armenian, and (b) who considers herself to be Armenian, or (c) who is more attached to Armenian culture (as a whole, not just in its religious, linguistic or other aspects) than to any other culture.

Now, an attachment to Armenian culture almost always implies an attachment to the Armenian homeland. This is because cultural assimilation is unavoidable for Armenians living outside of the Armenian homeland, and it is especially inevitable as long as at least some form of Armenian self-determination in the Armenian homeland does not exist. Therefore, being Armenian should also imply attachment to the Armenian homeland. This attachment would at least be of a cultural character, but it may also be political.

So we arrive at the following definition: An *Armenian* is anyone whose ancestors have been Armenian, who considers herself to be Armenian, or who is more attached to Armenian culture than to any other culture, and who is thus likely to feel an attachment to the Armenian homeland.

There exist two major categories of Armenians today:

(1a) *Armenians Native to the Armenian Homeland*: Armenians native to the Armenian homeland include all Armenians\* living in Soviet Armenia, Karabagh, Akhalkalak, Nakhichevan, and the northeastern regions of present-day Turkey\* which have historically been populated by Armenians.

The conditions for national self-determination of Armenians living within these different areas vary greatly. Armenians living within Soviet Armenia exercise some of their rights to self-determination, and with the recent mass democratic movement, they are gaining more and more control of the administration of their own state and governmental bodies. Armenians living in Akhalkalak lack the means to fully express their national self-determination, due to their exclusion from Soviet Armenia and their consequent inability to participate in the mainstream of (Soviet) Armenian



social, political, cultural and economic life, as well as due to the yet very faulty approach to the national question in the U.S.S.R. Chauvinist authorities have for decades denied Armenians living in Artsakh (roughly, Karabagh) and Nakhichevan their national rights, and today these Armenians are struggling for reunification with Soviet Armenia. Meanwhile, the very few Armenians who remain in present-day northeastern Turkey are completely denied self-determination, not to mention their basic human rights, or even the scant rights of other Turkish citizens. Armenians within the Turkish state today are continually oppressed and physically threatened by Turkish chauvinist and colonialist policies.

Other Armenians native to the Armenian homeland include those Armenians who have their primary and permanent residences in any part of the Armenian homeland. These would include, for example, Soviet Armenian diplomats or technicians abroad, or Armenians from present-day "Western Armenia"<sup>13</sup> who still consider their primary and permanent residence to be their homes in present-day northeastern Turkey.

(1b) *Armenians of the Diaspora:* Armenians of the diaspora are all those Armenians\* who were born in, or have their permanent residence outside of, the Armenian homeland.\* This category includes Armenians residing in parts of the Soviet Union outside of Soviet Armenia, Karabagh, Akhalkalak and Nakhichevan, those residing in parts of present-day Turkey\* outside of the Armenian homeland in the northeast, and those residing in dozens of other countries all over the globe.

Armenians of the diaspora (unlike Armenians native to the Armenian homeland\*) do not have direct economic ties to the economies of any part of the Armenian homeland. Instead, their attachment to the Armenian homeland is basically subjective—mostly cultural, but also with its political dimensions. Although they are inevitably influenced by local cultures, they still remain more closely attached to Armenian culture\* than to any other cultural sphere. They are also subject to a wide range of cultural, social, political and economic conditions depending on where they reside.

(2) *Culturally Assimilated Armenians:* These include all persons of Armenian\* ancestry who are no longer primarily attached to Armenian culture,\* that is, who recognize their Armenian heritage but who are more attached to some other culture than to Armenian culture.

Most culturally assimilated Armenians are to be found in the diaspora, especially in North and South America and western Europe. Some of these people may consciously express their primary attachment to local cultures by saying that they are "more French than Armenian" or "an American first

and an Armenian second." But often they do not express this sentiment in a conscious manner; instead, their social and cultural mode of existence makes this fact very obvious.

In many cases economic factors have been the driving force behind cultural assimilation. Diasporan Armenians\* who are capitalists spontaneously identify with their countries of residence because they enjoy a privileged status in these countries. As a result, many bourgeois "Armenians" should more accurately be described as culturally assimilated Armenians than as Armenians of the diaspora.\* (It should be recognized, nevertheless, that there are large numbers of culturally assimilated Armenians from all class backgrounds, and their numbers are growing.)

There are also many culturally assimilated Armenians within the Armenian homeland\* in present-day Turkey.\* These people may or may not be aware of their Armenian heritage, but they have gradually adopted—or have been forced to adopt—Kurdish\* or Turkish culture\* as their primary culture.

In addition, some diasporan Armenians who waver between adhering to Armenian culture and adopting another culture could be described as semi-culturally assimilated. These people may speak Armenian and surround themselves with tokens of Armenian culture, but in reality they are not deeply concerned with Armenian culture (or even with their own personal cultural enrichment). Every community of the diaspora also has its share of nouveaux riches who vacillate between the dominant cultures and ostentatious displays of "ethnic culture."

(3) *Non-Armenians of Armenian Ancestry:* Within this category are included all those persons of Armenian\* ancestry who show no more trace of attachment to Armenian culture\* than to their Armenian heritage. Such persons may be aware that their ancestors were Armenian and they may retain their Armenian names, but in all other respects they have adopted a non-Armenian culture and homeland as their own.

As in the case of culturally assimilated Armenians, most non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry are found in the Americas and western Europe. Although they are to be found within all classes in the diaspora, a greater percentage of diasporan Armenians\* who are bourgeois have adopted their erstwhile "host" countries as their own. Hence, they have become *non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry*, or "Armenians by name only." There are also many non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry in present-day northeastern Turkey.\* These include completely Kurdified, Turkified or Lazified<sup>14</sup> people of Armenian origin, among whom we may count Kurds\* in the Sasoon region and many natives of the mountainous Hemshin region near the Jorokh River.



(4) *Diasporan Armenians*: This term applies to all Armenians\* who live in the diaspora, as well as all culturally assimilated Armenians.\* Thus the term refers in general to all people of Armenian heritage who live outside the Armenian homeland\* and who still to a greater or lesser degree feel an attachment to Armenian culture.\* Hence *diasporan Armenians* are not all Armenians\* in the sense of the first entry in this glossary, while *Armenians of the diaspora*\* comprise that subset of diasporan Armenians who are Armenians, as defined above.

Before proceeding, three remarks are in order:

First, if we fail to distinguish among kinds of diasporan Armenians, we run the risk of overestimating the political potential of the diaspora relative to the rest of the nation. To cite one example, it is generally agreed that there are some 700,000 "Armenians" (i.e., persons of Armenian\* origin) in the U.S.A. This number, however, can be very misleading if one compares it unit-for-unit with the number of "Armenians" in Iran or Soviet Armenia. Among the 700,000 "Armenians" in the U.S.A. there is a relatively high proportion of non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry\* and culturally assimilated Armenians.\* Indeed, these two groups probably comprise the greater part of the fabled "Armenian community in the United States." Certainly, recent studies by sociologists in the United States<sup>15</sup> would appear to bear this claim out.

If more people recognized that there is a qualitative difference between the "Armenians" of the Iranian-Armenian community and those in the United States, then we would not run the risk of the kind of error which is widely made right now. In the "Middle East," and even in the Armenian S.S.R., much unwarranted hope is being pinned on assistance from "Armenians" in the United States, including wealthy individuals and politicians. Evidently, there is much hope of receiving large-scale material aid, capital investment and even political support from the wildly overrated diasporan community in the U.S. These hopes, of course, will never be fulfilled.

Second Remark: The definitions provided here are generalizations which are intended to facilitate further analyses. As descriptions of global realities, they should not be taken to represent any final, rigid or even necessarily irreversible categorization of specific persons. On the contrary, individuals may pass from one category to another according to their cultural, political and psychological orientation.

Let us take an obvious illustration: It is true that there is a general trend toward cultural assimilation in diaspora. On the other hand, however, we have recently witnessed a different trend among a minority of diasporan Armenians. Thanks in part to the interest generated by the armed propaganda of the late 1970s and early 80s, many young people, who a few years

ago could have been described as culturally assimilated Armenians, can now be counted as Armenians of the diaspora.

Third remark: None of these definitions should be taken as value judgments of any kind. Our aim is not to associate a person's moral virtue with her degree of attachment to Armenian culture. Rather, we aim to accurately assess the progressive organizational potential of the Armenian people on a community-by-community basis.

(5) *Armenian Culture*: This term refers to the distinct traditions that have been developed for the most part within the Armenian homeland\* by the Armenian people\* throughout their entire history. It refers to all the original material and mental creations, as well as all adaptations of other cultural motifs which have become generally recognized as "Armenian" or as belonging to the Armenian people.

It should be noted that Armenian culture has developed over thousands of years and under very diverse economic and political circumstances. The Armenian people and the Armenian homeland have more frequently been subjected to foreign domination than to self-rule. But throughout their history, as long as Armenians\* have lived collectively on their homeland, they have been able to maintain and develop the very culture which defines them as a distinct people. At times Armenian cultural development in the homeland has been supplemented by Armenian cultural achievements outside; nevertheless, at all times the mainstream of Armenian culture has remained within the Armenian homeland. Even the supplementary cultural achievements outside the Armenian homeland have been based on the culture developed in the homeland and have been directed back toward that homeland, rather than further dispersion. Armenian cultural development within the Armenian homeland, though never coming to a full stop, has accelerated, decelerated and changed apace with shifts in the economic and political state of affairs. Speaking broadly, at times of invasion, cultural expressions have often reflected popular rejection of the invaders, while at times of relative peace, prosperity and self-government, culture has expanded rapidly in many directions.

Armenian culture, like any other culture, has its own distinct characteristics and is in a state of constant change and development. Contemporary Armenian culture is by far the most vibrant in Soviet Armenia, while in the diaspora cultural conservatism (*hayababbanum*), rather than innovation, has become the rule. As a result, there is a tendency in diaspora to equate "culture" with the cultural heritage of the past. This, of course, does not imply that there has been absolutely no cultural innovation in the diaspora; rather, it means that creativity has been very limited in comparison with cultural developments in the Armenian homeland.



(6) *Armenian People*: Under this heading may be included all Armenians native to the Armenian homeland,\* all Armenians of the diaspora\* and all culturally assimilated Armenians.\* The Armenian people, in short, includes all those of Armenian\* origin who in one way or another lay claim to Armenian culture\* as their own (it should be recalled that this usually entails some degree of attachment to the Armenian homeland).

(7) *Armenian Homeland*: The Armenian homeland includes all those areas where the Armenian people\* have originated and formed as a distinct people, have historically lived (usually as a majority or at least as a plurality in relation to the total local population) and have developed as a cultural-national entity, frequently enjoying political self-rule. In more precise geographical terms, the Armenian homeland includes Soviet Armenia, Karabagh, Akhalkalak, Nakhichevan and the following regions of present-day Turkey\*: Erzeroum, Kars, Ardahan, Bitlis, Moosh, Van, as well as certain areas in the regions of Kharpert (Elazig) and Diyarbekir. Therefore, the Armenian homeland is that area in which, at least until the genocide of 1915, the Armenian people have constituted the major cultural-national entity. As such, the Armenian homeland is what has otherwise been called "Historic Armenia."

It should be noted that the Armenian homeland has not been and is not today exclusively the homeland of the Armenian people. (Refer to the next entry, "Native Peoples of the Armenian Homeland.")

(8) *Native Peoples of the Armenian Homeland*: The native peoples of the Armenian homeland include all those peoples who have originated in the regions of the Armenian homeland\* or who have historically settled in this region, adopting it as their permanent residence, their homeland. Among the native peoples of the Armenian homeland we may count the Armenian people\* (including diasporan Armenians\*), the Kurdish people\* (those living in the regions defined above as the Armenian homeland or who currently work elsewhere but who have originated in that area and still consider that area to be their primary residence), the Turkish people\* who live in that same region, the Laz, Circassian (Cherkez), Assyrian, and other national minorities\* who live in the same region of present-day Turkey,\* and the Georgians, Azeris, Kurds,\* etc. who live in the regions of the Armenian homeland in the U.S.S.R.

Examples of nonnative populations which are now present in the Armenian homeland are NATO and U.S. military personnel and resettled Afghans.

(9) *Armenia*: Today, this term refers to that part of the Armenian homeland\* where the Armenian people\* currently constitute at least a

plurality of the population (Soviet Armenia, Karabagh, Akhalkalak), as well as those parts where in the future the Armenians\* may constitute at least a plurality of the population (parts of the Armenian homeland in present-day Turkey\* and Nakhichevan) and/or all areas of the Armenian homeland which will be democratically recognized by the majority of the overall population as to be included in an Armenian state structure.

Throughout their history the Armenian people have exercised various forms of self-government and self-determination in parts of, or over the whole of, the Armenian homeland. Historically, "Armenia" has referred to roughly the whole of the Armenian homeland, what is known as "Historic Armenia." Since the Armenian homeland has been Armenia, in principle the Armenian people could be justified in including all of the Armenian homeland in a future Armenia. However, for a number of reasons it is very possible that a future Armenia will not encompass the Armenian homeland in its totality. For one thing, we are all aware that the genocide and deportations have emptied much of the region of its Armenian inhabitants. What is more, millions of Turks,\* Kurds\* and other minorities\* currently inhabit those parts of the Armenian homeland currently controlled by Ankara. In addition to all of these considerations, the number of Armenians who might resettle in those regions is likely to be small relative to the number of other peoples already living there. This last consideration further diminishes the chance that (short of an initiative by Soviet Armenia) Armenians will ever comprise at least a plurality in the whole of the Armenian homeland. Thus, the future status of parts of the Armenian homeland will largely depend upon two things: (a) the practical attachment of all Armenian people to that homeland as expressed through their struggle and willingness to live there; and (b) efforts to convince as large a proportion as possible of non-Armenian inhabitants to prefer or accept inclusion within a future Armenia.

It is foreseeable, then, that a future Armenia will not encompass the same territory as historic Armenia. Thus, the term Armenia has more of a political and administrative connotation than does "historic Armenia."

(10) *Native Peoples of Armenia*: The native peoples of Armenia include the Armenian people\* and all those peoples native to the Armenian homeland\* who live in areas defined as Armenia.\*

(11) *Armenian Nation*: The Armenian nation\* is the union of the Armenian people\* with the Armenian homeland.\* The Armenian nation includes all those Armenians\* who live in their homeland or who are devoted to the existence of the Armenian people in their homeland.



(12) *Cilicia*: The Armenian people\* did not originate in Cilicia (the mountainous Mediterranean coastal region of present-day eastern Turkey\* adjacent to the Syrian border); nevertheless, ever since the eleventh century A.D., they have constituted a sizable portion of the population. For about 300 years Armenians\* even constituted a majority or plurality of the population of the region, which at that time was governed as Armenian princedoms and later as an Armenian kingdom. For centuries, Cilicia has been an important source of Armenian cultural activity and a second center of national life. For these reasons, Armenians of the region should be considered part of the indigenous population, along with Turks,\* Kurds,\* Arabs and other peoples present.

During the past centuries, the proportion of Armenians in relation to the total population of Cilicia has dropped substantially. Today, Cilicia can by no means be considered a part of the Armenian homeland.\* Centuries of constant demographic and political change which predated the genocide (and other massacres) have made the larger part of Cilicia a part of the Turkish homeland,\* while the subregion of Iskenderia (Hatay) has been associated with the Arab people and Syria.

Although Cilicia is now in present-day Turkey, in the future the region of Iskenderia could be re-included into an Arab state. For anyone who takes the principle of self-determination seriously, this should be decided by the inhabitants of the region themselves. Since there has been an historic Armenian community in Cilicia, however, all Armenians who trace their origins to the region should enjoy the full right to reinhabit the region if they so choose. They should be allowed to exercise their rights as an indigenous national minority on an equal footing with other indigenous peoples of Cilicia.

(13) *Historic Armenian Communities outside the Armenian Homeland*: For a long time and for a variety of reasons, significant numbers of Armenians\* have settled in areas near to, but outside of, their homeland. In some cases, they have concentrated in diasporan communities, and there they have lived as an Armenian minority for centuries. More often than not, these diasporan Armenians\* have kept close ties with their compatriots in the homeland. In past centuries, before the establishment of the modern state and the development of capitalism, national markets, and modern transportation and communications networks, diasporan communities in the vicinity of the Armenian homeland\* managed to survive with a slow rate of assimilation. Some of these communities have retained their distinct cultural-national identity to this day. Thus, there are today historic Armenian communities outside the Armenian homeland. Examples of such communities which still exist are those in the regions of Isphahan (Iran), those in northwest Iran (the Azerbaijan prov-

inces), those in Baku,<sup>16</sup> Tiflis and Istanbul. Members of these communities are both natives of their respective non-Armenian homelands and an integral part of the Armenian people.\*

### Kurdish-Related Terms:

(14) *Kurd*: As in the case of the term "Armenian,"\* this term has meant various things at various times. While the *Kardechoi* (who were most probably the ancient ancestors of the Kurds) may have been only clanlike groupings, the Kurds later became tribes which eventually evolved into a distinct cultural-national entity. And this, despite the division of their population between the present-day borders of Turkey,\* Iran, Iraq, Syria and to a much lesser extent the U.S.S.R. (in particular, the Armenian S.S.R.). The vast majority of Kurds currently still live in the Kurdish homeland,\* which stretches throughout the above-mentioned areas (except for areas within the U.S.S.R.).

Most Kurds still speak one or another dialect of Kurdish, and follow a life which is primarily attached to Kurdish culture.\* Other Kurds currently live outside of the Kurdish homeland, as a result of forced deportation by more than one government (over the years, for example, many Kurds were deported to western regions of Anatolia by Ankara). Other reasons for the existence of a Kurdish diaspora is the search for employment. Tens of thousands of Kurds from present-day Turkey now work in Europe, and thousands of others work in Istanbul, Ankara, Baghdad, Tehran and elsewhere. Most Kurds of the diaspora\* are still strongly attached to Kurdish culture\* and the vast majority have familial ties (and permanent residences) in the Kurdish homeland. Nevertheless, Kurds—and especially those residing outside of the Kurdish homeland—are the object of gradual assimilation. Even within the Kurdish homeland, reactionary regimes are exercising a policy of assimilation which in many cases has included violence and widespread military operations against Kurdish populations—not to mention mass deportations, massacres and other attempts to eliminate the Kurds from certain regions. As a result, there are now many Kurdish elements who can no longer speak Kurdish, or who are unacquainted with certain aspects of Kurdish culture, but who are, nevertheless, still primarily attached to Kurdish culture on the whole.

Today, a *Kurd* is anyone whose ancestors have been Kurds, who considers herself to be a Kurd, and who is more attached to Kurdish culture than to any other culture. As in the case of Armenians, being a Kurd entails some degree of attachment to at least the idea of a Kurdish homeland (because the continuity of Kurdish culture depends on a collective Kurdish life in a Kurdish homeland).



(14a) *Kurds Native to the Kurdish Homeland:* Kurds native to the Kurdish homeland include all Kurds\* living in the Kurdish homeland\* (or living outside of the homeland but retaining a permanent residence there).

(14b) *Kurds of the Diaspora:* Although the vast majority of Kurds\* still live in the Kurdish homeland,\* a Kurdish diaspora does exist. The Kurds of the diaspora are all those Kurds who permanently reside outside of their homeland. A large majority of these reside in non-Kurdish areas of Turkey,\* Iran, Iraq and Syria. Although they are inevitably influenced by local cultures, they still remain more strongly attached to Kurdish culture\* than to any other culture.

(15) *Culturally Assimilated Kurds:* Culturally assimilated Kurds include all persons of Kurdish ancestry who are no longer primarily attached to Kurdish culture,\* that is, who recognize their Kurdish heritage but are more attached to some other culture. Most culturally assimilated Kurds include those who live outside of the Kurdish homeland\* and who have been assimilated into the bourgeoisies (especially the middle and big bourgeoisies) of those countries among which the Kurdish homeland is divided (these would include some culturally assimilated Kurdish businessmen in Tehran, Baghdad, Istanbul, etc.). It should be noted that culturally assimilated Kurds make up a relatively small proportion of the Kurdish people.\*

(16) *Non-Kurds of Kurdish Ancestry:* This category includes all those descendants of Kurds\* who do not feel an attachment to Kurdish culture\* or to their Kurdish heritage (even if they may be aware that their ancestors were Kurds). Such persons have totally adopted a non-Kurdish culture or homeland as their own. An example of non-Kurds of Kurdish ancestry are the nominally "Kurdish" tribes of Turkmenistan who are no longer culturally attached to the Kurdish homeland\* or to mainstream Kurdish culture and who have adopted Turkmenistan as their homeland.

(17) *Diasporan Kurds:* This term refers to all Kurds of the diaspora\* and all culturally assimilated Kurds.\*

(18) *Kurdish Culture:* Kurdish culture comprises the distinct material and intellectual traditions that have been developed for the most part within the Kurdish homeland\* by the Kurdish people\* throughout the entire history of the region. Kurdish culture encompasses both the original material and intellectual creations as well as adaptations of other cultural motifs which have become generally recognized as Kurdish or as belonging to the Kurdish people.

(19) *Kurdish People:* The Kurdish people include all Kurds native to the Kurdish homeland,\* all Kurds of the diaspora,\* and on a secondary level all culturally assimilated Kurds.\* In short, the Kurdish people includes all those elements of Kurdish origin who, to a greater or lesser extent, recognize Kurdish culture\* as their own. It should be noted that the vast majority of the Kurdish people live within the Kurdish homeland.

(20) *Kurdish Homeland:* The Kurdish homeland includes all those areas where the Kurdish people\* have originated and formed as a cultural-national entity, a distinct people which has sometimes achieved one or another form of political self-rule. The greater part of the Kurdish homeland is still populated by at least a plurality of Kurds.\* This includes the present-day Iranian regions of Kermanshah, Sanandaj, Mahabad, Paveh, Sardasht, Naghadeh and Sakkuz, as well as many areas along the present Turkish-Iranian frontier; the present-day Iraqi regions of Zakho, the vicinity of Mosul, Kirkuk, Suleimania, Erbil, etc.; the present-day northeastern extremity of Syria around Khamishli and Derik; and most of the following regions in present-day southeastern Turkey\*: Mardin, Urfa, Diyarbakir, Siirt, Hakkari and regions around Elazig, etc. (Refer to the map at the end of this chapter.)

A couple of programmatic notes: Today the greater part of the Armenian homeland\* now controlled by the Turkish state is populated by a majority of Kurds. This has been the case since the Armenian\* plurality or majority (depending on the region) was diminished by massacre in the late nineteenth century, and then decimated in the genocide of 1915. Many of these Kurds are indigenous to the area, being descendants of the tribes and populations which have lived in the region for centuries.

Should the Armenian people\* fail to mobilize their forces sufficiently to create a democratic consensus throughout the Armenian homeland for inclusion within a future Armenia,\* it is possible that certain regions may end up in a future Kurdistan\* or Turkish socialist state. Whatever the case may be, all native peoples of this part of the Armenian homeland (including the Armenians, of course) must be guaranteed all of their national, cultural and democratic rights as equal citizens.

Another point should be repeated here: Strict demographic factors alone are not sufficient to define the state or administrative status of a region. The will of *all* peoples in question must be taken into account. By definition, the people concerned in the future of the Armenian homeland are all native peoples of Armenia.\* This of course includes all Armenians, particularly Armenians of the Armenian S.S.R., since they comprise the majority of the Armenian nation\* and since at least half of them trace their origins across



the border. Hence, in assessing future possibilities for regions now in Turkey, the democratic and national rights of Armenians in Soviet Armenia (and the U.S.S.R. in general) must also be taken into account.<sup>17</sup>

Other factors are also important, including the economic and material interests of all peoples involved. This factor may at least to some extent cut across demographic categories. In the case of the part of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey, for instance, all of its future inhabitants, Armenian and non-Armenian, might expect faster economic and social development (as well as greater security) as part of the Armenian S.S.R. in the U.S.S.R. This has already been the case of the Kurds in Soviet Armenia.

Historic factors also have a role to play. For historical and national reasons, for example, the Kazakhstan S.S.R. has remained a separate Soviet republic, despite the fact that for an important part of its modern history the Kazakh people have been a definite minority and Russians a plurality. Similarly, in the Abkhazia Autonomous S.S.R. the Abkhaz people make up a small minority of the total population.

These explanations are necessary to understand how, despite the great importance of demographic factors, the future of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey will depend on a combination of factors. In the absence of any initiative from Soviet Armenia it is likely that these regions will be integrated into a future Kurdistan and/or Turkey. Indeed, the non-Armenian populations there are native to the land.

However, even if those regions are included in a future Kurdistan or Turkey, it would still be appropriate to consider them to be parts of the Armenian homeland. It should be clear from a review of the terms Armenian homeland, Kurdish homeland and Turkish homeland\* that these terms have more of a historical and cultural significance, whereas the terms Armenia, Kurdistan and Turkey have more of a political and administrative significance.

(21) *Native Peoples of the Kurdish Homeland:* This category includes all peoples who have originated in and adopted the region of the Kurdish homeland\* as their permanent residence, as their homeland. Among these peoples we may count the Kurdish people,\* the Armenian people\* living in the Kurdish homeland (in Zakho and Khamishli, for instance), as well as the Turkish,\* Arab, Iranian, Azeri and Assyrian peoples living in the Kurdish homeland, in addition to other national minorities\* living in the region, as well as various religious minorities such as Jews.

As native peoples of the Kurdish homeland all of these peoples and elements must share equal rights as inhabitants of the region.

(22) *Kurdistan:* Kurdistan is that part of the Kurdish homeland\* where the Kurdish people\* today constitute at least a plurality of the population, and

where by the democratic will of the general population a Kurdish national, political and administrative entity will be set up. (Depending on future developments, Kurdistan may also include some areas of the Kurdish homeland in Iraq in which Kurds\* currently constitute a minority as a result of forced deportations and the settlement of Arabs.)

Thus, in the absence of Armenian\* initiatives, the eventual political-administrative frontiers of a future Kurdistan might include areas of the Armenian homeland\* where, after liberation of the area from the Turkish state, and in the event that it is not attached to Soviet Armenia, the Kurdish people will make up at least a plurality of the population. Again, it is not possible at present to draw rigid borders that would constitute the definitive frontiers of Kurdistan. An accurate geographic delineation will evolve as the struggles of the Kurdish, Armenian,\* Turkish,\* Azeri, Iranian and Arab peoples for national self-determination and socialism progress. Only with the maturation of these struggles will it be possible to draw up the definitive borders of Kurdistan (as well as Armenia,\* Turkey,\* Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Syria, etc.), or at least at the preliminary stage, to confidently delineate autonomous Kurdish areas in each country that may later unite to form a politically united Kurdistan. Just as certain areas of the Armenian homeland might not be included in a future Armenia, similarly certain areas currently within the Kurdish homeland might not be included in a future united Kurdistan. (Compare to the entries Turkey and Turkish homeland, below.)

(23) *Native Peoples of Kurdistan:* The native peoples of Kurdistan include the Kurdish people\* and all those peoples mentioned in entry 22 who will be living in Kurdistan\* by the time it becomes a more definitive geographic entity.

All of these peoples and elements should enjoy equal rights as inhabitants of Kurdistan.

(24) *Kurdish Nation:* The Kurdish nation is the union of the Kurdish people\* with the Kurdish homeland.\* It includes all those Kurdish people who live in the Kurdish homeland or who are devoted to the existence of the Kurdish people in the Kurdish homeland.

(25) *Historic Kurdish Communities outside the Kurdish Homeland:* For a variety of reasons, significant numbers of Kurds\* have lived in areas near to but outside of the Kurdish homeland.\* There they have concentrated and lived as minorities for centuries. In most cases they have remained in close contact with the Kurds of the Kurdish homeland. In this way, and thanks to the conditions which slowed assimilation in past centuries, these communities have continued their Kurdish cultural-national development, while at



the same time becoming natives of regions outside the Kurdish homeland. Historic Kurdish communities outside the Kurdish homeland exist in Cilicia,\* the Armenian homeland\* and the Azerbaijan S.S.R., as well as in various non-Kurdish parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.\* Members of these communities are both natives of their respective non-Kurdish homelands and an integral part of the Kurdish people.\*

From a democratic and internationalist perspective members of these communities should enjoy all democratic, cultural-national and human rights. Those wishing to live within the context of undiminished Kurdish national life, however, would most likely choose to live within the Kurdish homeland.

### Turkish-Related Terms:

(26) *Turk*: Like the term Armenian,\* the term Turk has also meant various things at various times. During the formation of the first Turkic grouping the "Turk" had a tribal (or *il*) significance. Later on, it referred to all those who spoke Turkic dialects of the Ural-Altaic language family, or to those who were dominated by, or in league with, tribes speaking a Turkic language (the latter category includes Selcuks, the Kara Koyunlu, etc.). And still later, the term was associated with the Ottomans. However, it was not until the late Ottoman period that Turks emerged as the distinct cultural-national entity that they are now. Today, a Turk is recognized to be anyone whose ancestors have been Turks, who considers herself to be a Turk and who is more attached to Turkish culture\* than to any other national culture.

Attachment to Turkish culture may be accompanied by some form of attachment to the Turkish homeland.\* However, there are many Turkish communities outside of the Turkish homeland whose members are attached to Turkish culture and who are thus properly defined as Turks, but who nevertheless are not very attached to the Turkish homeland, or who without accepting another culture over Turkish culture, currently identify a different homeland as their own. Partly as a result of protracted isolation from the Turkish homeland, many self-identified Turks in Europe, Cyprus and elsewhere cling to Turkish culture and yet consider their primary homeland to be that of their respective countries.<sup>18</sup>

Examples of non-Turks who have had more or less distant historic ties to the present-day Turks and who share cultural or linguistic traits, but who in modern terms comprise separate and distinct cultural-national formations, are the Uzbeks, Uighurs, Turkmens, Kirghiz, Azeris, Kazakhs, Tatars and others. These peoples should not be confused with the Turks native to the Turkish homeland.\*

(26a) *Turks Native to the Turkish Homeland*: Turks native to the Turkish homeland include all Turks\* living in (or currently living outside of but retaining permanent residence within) the Turkish homeland.\* The vast majority of Turks may be included in this category.

(26b) *Turks of the Diaspora*: Although most Turks\* reside within the Turkish homeland,\* since the 1960s and 1970s many thousands have left Turkey\* for western Europe, mostly in search of employment. These Turks live in a diaspora which, though substantial in absolute numbers, is far smaller relative to the total size of the nation than is the Armenian\* diaspora.

Turks of the diaspora are all those Turks whose immediate ancestors hail from the Turkish homeland, but who reside permanently outside of that homeland. Although local cultures invariably exercise an influence, Turks of the diaspora still remain more closely attached to Turkish culture\* than to any other culture.

Turks of the diaspora differ from Armenians and Kurds of the diaspora\* in at least one important respect. The Turkish people\* already enjoy a collective life in their homeland, a collective life which is not currently threatened by a foreign oppressor, occupier or colonial force (the Turkish people are rather subject "only" to internal class exploitation and external imperialist domination). Because of this, Turks of the diaspora may be less inclined to associate their attachment to Turkish culture with the need to secure the existence of a Turkish political formation.

(27) *Culturally Assimilated Turks*: Included under this heading are persons of Turkish ancestry who are no longer primarily attached to Turkish culture.\* This would include those who acknowledge their Turkish heritage but are more attached to some other culture than to Turkish culture. Culturally assimilated Turks include U.S. citizens of Turkish ancestry, many people of Turkish ancestry in Europe and Arab countries, etc. The number of culturally assimilated Turks is relatively small.

(28) *Non-Turks of Turkish Ancestry*: This category includes all persons of Turkish ancestry who (whether or not they are aware that their ancestors were Turks\*) show no trace of attachment to Turkish culture\* or to their Turkish heritage. Non-Turks of Turkish ancestry have completely adopted a non-Turkish culture as their own. Among the relatively small number of these elements, we may count Arabized people of Turkish ancestry and completely assimilated people of Turkish ancestry in the U.S.A. and western Europe.



(29) *Diasporan Turks*: This category is composed of all Turks of the diaspora\* and all culturally assimilated Turks.\*

(30) *Historic Turkish Communities outside the Turkish Homeland*: Before and during the Ottoman period, Turkish elements settled in the area of southeastern Europe, Cyprus, Syria, the Armenian\* and Kurdish homelands,\* etc. These Turkish elements increased in number and became native peoples of non-Turkish regions. After the breakup of the Ottoman empire, many of these Turkish elements were cut off from the mainstream of Turkish cultural development. Despite their geopolitical break with the Turkish homeland,\* however, they continued to live as Turks,\* remaining attached to essentially the same Turkish culture\* as was present in the Turkish homeland. Nevertheless, they came to recognize their country of residence as their primary homeland.

The category of historic Turkish communities outside the Turkish homeland includes all concentrations of populations of Turkish origin which were established outside the present Turkish homeland. In general these concentrations grew in strength during the period of the Ottoman Empire and continued to be attached to Turkish culture after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Most of these people today identify their country of residence outside of Turkey\* to be their homeland.

By and large, historic Turkish communities outside the Turkish homeland have resisted assimilation into more prominent cultures and peoples around them, and have retained forms of Turkish culture similar to that of the Turkish homeland; however, the culture of some of these communities is gradually becoming more distinct due to their isolation from the Turkish homeland. This trend has reached different stages in different localities: in southeastern Europe and Syria a distinctive cultural evolution has led to much assimilation into the local cultures. In Cyprus this process has given rise to a Turkish-Cypriot culture, and in Greece the historic Turkish community is culturally attached to the Turkish homeland, although some cultural assimilation has taken place. In the parts of the Armenian and Kurdish homelands currently under Ankara's control, the historic Turkish communities are directly tied to Turkey in the sense that they are included within the same geopolitical boundaries and economic and administrative sphere of the Turkish state. Thus, these Turks are culturally homogeneous with the Turkish people\* in the Turkish homeland.

(31) *Turkish Culture*: This term refers to the distinct material and intellectual traditions that have developed for the most part within the Turkish homeland\* by the Turkish people,\* especially during the Ottoman period and the twentieth century. It refers to much of the pre-Turkic tribal

culture which provided its early base, as well as to all the creations which have become generally recognized as belonging to the Turkish people.

(32) *Turkish People*: This category includes: all Turks native to the Turkish homeland\*; all Turks of the diaspora\*; all members of the historic Turkish communities in the Armenian\* and Kurdish homelands\* (i.e., those within the present political boundaries of the Turkish state who are directly tied to the Turkish people native to the Turkish homeland\*); nonassimilated elements of the historic Turkish communities in Greece, Syria, etc.; and elements of Turkish origin who, to a greater or lesser degree, embrace the Turkish culture\* of present-day Turkey\* as their own.

It should be noted that a great majority of the Turkish people live within the Turkish homeland. It might also be noted in passing that most members of the historic Turkish communities of southeastern Europe and Cyprus are primarily attached to their local homelands (rather than the Turkish homeland) and make up an intrinsic part of those countries.

(33) *Turkish Homeland*: The Turkish homeland includes all those areas within the geopolitical boundaries of present-day Turkey\* where the Turkish people\* have settled and developed as a distinct cultural-national entity (an entity which for the last 400 years has comprised the dominant political and military force in this region). Thus, the Turkish homeland comprises those parts of present-day Turkey\* which lie outside the Armenian\* and Kurdish homelands\* and outside several other regions, including the Arab region of Iskenderia (Hatay), as well as the mountainous Black Sea coastal homeland areas of the Laz, Cherkez and other peoples.<sup>19</sup> The Turkish people comprise the majority of the population throughout the Turkish homeland. Since the exact boundaries of the other homelands currently controlled by Turkey cannot be definitively determined at this point in history, the exact borders of the Turkish homeland are also for the moment only approximate. (Refer to the map at the end of the present text.)

(34) *Native Peoples of the Turkish Homeland*: The native peoples of the Turkish homeland include all those peoples who have originated in, or historically settled in and adopted, the region as their permanent residence—i.e., their homeland. This includes the Turkish people,\* the Armenian people\* having their permanent residences in parts of the Turkish homeland,\* the Kurdish people\* having their permanent residences in parts of the Turkish homeland,\* Arabs, Circassians (Cherkez), Greeks, Yezbeks, Lazes, Slavs, Assyrians and other minorities, as well as religious minorities who live in the Turkish homeland.<sup>20</sup>



All of these peoples and elements must share equal rights as inhabitants of the region.

It should be noted that the members of the historically Turkish communities in southeastern Europe, Syria and Cyprus, as well as Turkish elements in parts of the Kurdish homeland\* now within the political boundaries of present-day Iraq, are native peoples of their respective regions (except for those among them who are more directly tied to the Turkish homeland and who can also be included as natives of the Turkish homeland if they chose to transfer their permanent residences to that region). Examples of non-native elements in the Turkish homeland are NATO and U.S. troops, foreign employees, etc.

(35) *(Present-Day) Turkey*: This term refers to the region currently controlled by the Turkish regime with its capital at Ankara. As such, the term refers to a geopolitical entity which does not represent a homogeneous cultural-national whole, but is rather an aggregation of distinct homelands and peoples, all under the domination of Ankara. The present Turkish regime has a chauvinist character, but in recent times it has wavered between different degrees of reaction, military control and fascism. The regime occupies much of the Armenian homeland,\* and its occupation of a large portion of the Kurdish homeland\* has a colonial character. Furthermore, the Turkish regime controls the ethnically non-Turkish regions of Iskenderia and the eastern Black Sea coast, and it militarily occupies, economically exploits and politically dominates the northern region of Cyprus—the so-called “Independent Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.”

In the future—after the Armenian and Kurdish national liberation struggles score some successes—the term “Turkey” may come to refer to quite a different geopolitical entity, one which will possibly comply with the region defined as the Turkish homeland.\* The eventual delineation of the borders of Turkey will depend on the degree of success or failure of the Armenian and Kurdish liberation struggles, and perhaps the Circassian and other struggles. (With reference to the Armenian struggle, for example, questions which remain to be answered are whether certain regions of the Armenian homeland may be united with Soviet Armenia, or whether Armenians\* will enjoy full rights as a national minority in a future Turkish or Kurdish state. Also to be resolved is whether or not northern Kurdistan\* will achieve political independence from Turkey.)

Another reason it is impossible at this time to draw up the post-liberation political map of the region is that it remains to be seen what the demographic makeup of certain borderline (overlapping) regions will be. (We may occasionally refer to Turkey as “present-day Turkey,” to emphasize the temporary nature of the Turkish geopolitical entity as it now exists.)

(36) *Native Peoples of Turkey*: The native peoples of Turkey include the Turkish people\* and all those peoples mentioned above in entry 34 who currently live in Turkey,\* who consider their permanent residence to be in Turkey or who will be living in Turkey after Kurdistan\* or perhaps other regions achieve political independence from Turkey.

All native peoples of Turkey should enjoy equal rights.

(37) *Turkish Nation*: The Turkish nation is the union of the Turkish people\* with the Turkish homeland.\* The Turkish nation, then, includes all those Turks\* who live in the Turkish homeland or who are devoted to the existence of the Turkish people in their homeland.

### Minority-Related Terms:

(38) *National Minorities in Turkey*: A national minority in Turkey is any minority in Turkey\* which comprises a distinct cultural-national entity—i.e., which has a combination of cultural, historical, linguistic, religious and other traits that are definitive of the minority. Some national minorities in present-day Turkey include the Circassians, Armenians\* (in *present* reality), Greeks and Arabs.

All of these peoples must achieve at least national minority rights in Turkey. Although the Armenian people\* are currently a national minority in Turkey, there are circumstances which warrant special consideration in this case. Both diasporan Armenians\* and many of those who immigrated to Soviet Armenia during and after the genocide are descendants of people who were forcibly deported from their homeland. Millions of Armenians outside of Turkey feel a strong attachment to the part of the Armenian homeland\* currently within the borders of Turkey. Many of these Armenians strive to resettle in their homeland, and this has given rise to the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle. This struggle, if fully successful, may lead to the unification with Soviet Armenia of areas of the Armenian homeland currently within the borders of the Turkish state. If less successful, the struggle may lead to partial reunification or some sort of regional autonomy within Turkey and/or Kurdistan,\* where Armenians will make up a significant part of the local population. In any case, as a minimum demand the Armenian people must be granted full rights as a national minority within the Armenian homeland (whether in Turkey or in Kurdistan) and in other regions where they may have their permanent residences. This implies that *the Armenian case is not simply a case of self-determination as a national minority*.

The case of Circassians (Cherkez) is also special. The Circassians are concentrated on the southeastern coast of the Black Sea where they, along with



the Laz, comprise a significant percentage of the population. Because they constitute at least a plurality in many regions, their right to unite with Circassians in Soviet Georgia (as some Circassians desire) should be respected.

Likewise, Arabs (and others) in the region of Iskenderia (Hatay) make up a large part of the local population. Since this region has historically been associated with the Arab people and Syria, the inhabitants of the region should be able to choose whether they wish to unite with Syria or enjoy full national minority rights within Turkey.

Finally, let it be noted that the Kurds\* make up a colonized nation within their own homeland. Kurds constitute a national minority only outside the Kurdish homeland.\* There they should enjoy rights as a national minority.

(39) *Other Minorities in Turkey*: Apart from national minorities, there are also a number of other minorities in Turkey, including the Alawite, Jewish and Yezidi minorities (the latter of which is essentially part of the Kurdish nation\*). These have cultural, religious or other characteristics which in one way or another distinguish them from other natives.

All such minorities should be guaranteed their right to practice their faiths and develop themselves freely.

## Notes:

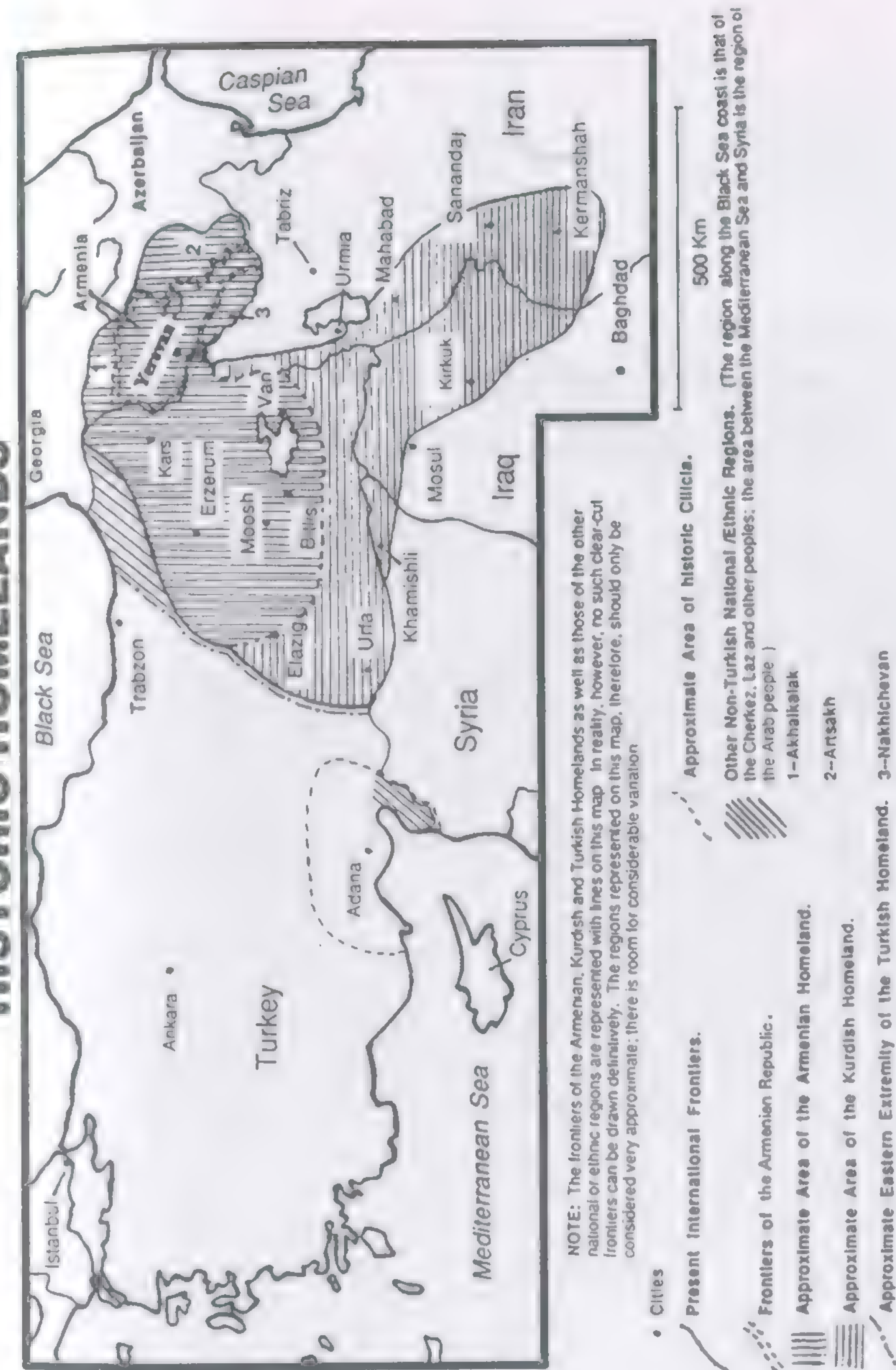
1. See the "Armenian Homeland" entry in the last section of this chapter. —Ed.  
To state that certain areas are historically a part of the Armenian homeland is not enough to guarantee their future inclusion in an Armenian state. —MM
2. Refer below to the section entitled "Definitions," in the present chapter of this volume, and to the map at the end of this chapter. —Ed.
3. See "The Orientation of our Goal" in Chapter Two, below. —Ed.
4. A Soviet initiative may not currently be advisable because any policy which could provoke a military conflict between NATO and the U.S.S.R. would be against our interests. —MM
5. Refer to Chapter Three, below. —Ed.
6. Refer to the third and fourth sections of Chapter Two, below. —Ed.
7. Refer to "The Question of Strategy," in Chapter Two, below. —Ed.
8. I am referring in particular to the planned preemptive Soviet attack on Turkey in 1941-2 and the territorial claims advanced after 1945. Neither of these moves ever came to anything, but compared to diasporan initiatives they were very important. At the same time, we must understand that the true reasons behind them had much more to do with Stalin's military and strategic calculations than with any conception of Armenian rights. —MM
9. Refer to Chapter Four, below. —Ed.
10. Greg asserted that Armenians in diaspora are no less deprived of self-determination than are the large number of Greeks who live outside of Greece. —Ed.
11. A resolution adopted at the 1981 T.K.P.-L. General Conference reads in part:  
... the Turkish government denies the Armenians their fundamental right to live on their own land and condemns them to a life in exile ... Our conference condemns the Armenian Genocide and the diaspora which followed it. The Armenian diaspora must be ended. Armenians who were forced to leave their land must be accorded the right to return freely, and the state must extend all possible aid to those who wish to return.—Ed.
12. In "Our Origins: True and False," at the beginning of this chapter, Melkonian sketched the gradual development of a recognizably distinct Armenian people from their Urartuan predecessors. —Ed.
13. For expedience, Melkonian occasionally used the term 'Western Armenia' to refer to those regions of the Armenian homeland\* currently within the borders of the Turkish state (i.e., "Turkey"\*). When he did



so, he set the term off in quotation marks to emphasize that, strictly speaking, the Armenian homeland is one indivisible whole and should not be thought of as the sum of two separate "Eastern" and "Western" homelands. —Ed.

14. Refer to "Minority-Related Terms," toward the end of this glossary. —MM
15. Monte noted that he cannot provide references here, but such references are needed. Several studies have been conducted in recent years which bear out Monte's claim, including research conducted in the late 1980s by sociologist Annie Bakalian at Columbia University. Dr. Bakalian's study is consistent with the view that "assimilation" of Armenians in the United States is taking place more rapidly than has commonly been recognized. —Ed.
16. The Armenian community in Baku has disappeared, due to migration after a series of anti-Armenian massacres that took place in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s. —Ed.
17. These points are discussed at greater length in Chapter Two, below. —Ed.
18. Refer to "Historic Turkish Communities outside the Turkish Homeland," in the glossary below. For further clarification of this and other definitions refer to the analogous entries relative to Armenian and Kurdish terms. —MM
19. Refer to "National Minorities in Turkey," below. —MM
20. Refer to entries 38 and 39, below. —Ed.

## HISTORIC HOMELANDS





*Chapter Two*  
DEFINING ARMENIAN  
NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION



*"The Question of Strategy" is a revised version of an article written in 1984. It was originally the last part of a text entitled A Critique of Armenian Armed Action, from the Early 1970s through 1983. This text appeared under the imprimatur of ASALA-Revolutionary Movement (ASALA-R.M.), the group which split from "Hagopian's" ASALA in the summer of 1983. Monte was not the sole author of the text, but he is known to have participated in writing it. It was later published in April of 1987 by the Kaytzer group in London, in a pamphlet entitled "Organizational Questions of the Diaspora and Correspondence with Monte Melkonian." The text which appears below comprises roughly the second half of this pamphlet, which was the eighth in a series of pamphlets collectively entitled Discussions in the Armenian Liberation Movement. (The first part of the same pamphlet appears in this volume as the first section of Chapter Three.)*

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## THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY

A strategy is a long-term plan of action to reach a given goal. Ultimately, the definition of a concrete goal and the formation of a clear political line determine a realistic strategy. Because this strategy should in theory be defined according to a concrete goal and a clear and realistic political line, it follows that any tactics not conforming to the strategy will be contrary to the achievement of the goal. A strategic goal should determine all tactics. In the past, one or another tactical decision resulting from a spontaneous or narrow consideration has been excused by some people as "a necessary response to a special situation" or "a realistic step necessitated by the special conditions of our struggle." Isolated, short-sighted tactics, however, have only compromised long-term progress toward our goal, since they fall outside of what should already have been a well-prepared, realistic and efficient political line and strategy.

Change, of course, is constant, and new and frequently unexpected circumstances come to the fore. Nevertheless, it is equally true that history, society and human behavior are proper objects of scientific inquiry. Despite periodic appearances to the contrary, nothing ever spontaneously goes berserk. Most historical change has been unintended, of course, but there are always identifiable *causes* of historical change. This is why a *scientific* political line can be drawn up, and why we can speak of a realistic and systematic political strategy.

In our case, the struggle projected according to our strategy will be protracted, and should be expected to have its advances as well as its reversals. The appearance of reversals, however, does not mean that the strategy should be changed. If the strategy is founded on an accurate



scientific appraisal of relevant considerations, then it should remain intact and the tactics should be changed. The range of tactics should be as broad and flexible as possible and new tactics should be adopted to meet the specific requirements of the conjuncture; however, all tactics should first and foremost fall within the parameters of the strategy. Any inconsistency between strategy and tactics should alert us that one or the other—or both—are wrong.

With this general understanding of strategy in mind, we shall turn to a consideration of the actual strategies of ASALA and the A.R.F.<sup>1</sup> After examining the general plan within which these groups have deployed the tactic of armed propaganda, we will discuss in broad outline the strategy of the Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement.<sup>2</sup>

### ASALA's Strategy

At the outset let us repeat the obvious: ASALA as a movement has never had a single identifiable strategy at all.<sup>3</sup> This has been born out time and again, from many different angles. If, for instance, one judges on the basis of ASALA interviews, communiques and publications, such as the official journal *Hayastan*, the one thing that becomes clear is that nothing is clear. It is not even clear what ASALA's ultimate goal is. True, one encounters terms such as "Free, United and Socialist Armenia," "a revolutionary socialist system," and the like. Not only are these terms ambiguous, however, but some of them even contradict one another. To cite an example, one of ASALA's favorite appeals is the call to "liberate Armenia." But what on earth the ASALA leadership means by this conglomeration of words is anybody's guess. Apart from manipulating the still-maturing emotions of many compatriots, such phrases have no programmatic substance. (As events have shown, the purpose of ASALA's formulations was not to define a struggle, but to exploit emotions to accomplish a series of uncoordinated and ill-defined activities.)

The only thing remotely resembling ASALA's "political line" was the mysterious Eight Points which appeared in *Hayastan*, No.1-2 (Fall 1980). Besides being unclear and varying according to published translations in one language or another, these eight points confuse tactics with strategy. Included as one of these eight presumably strategic points, for example, is "armed propaganda." Armed propaganda, however, is a special *tactic* which is appropriate to the early stages of the movement, but is not necessarily appropriate to every stage.

Reviewing the history of ASALA, it is clear that this was not merely a slip of the pen. Time and again, operations which should have been considered merely armed propaganda were given priority over the strategic goal of building a military presence on the ground in that part of the Armenian homeland<sup>4</sup> controlled by Ankara.

Without a clear goal and a political line which reflects that goal, it is not possible to produce a realistic strategy. This conviction lies at the basis of our observation that ASALA has no strategy. Even if we ignore the absence of a satisfactory stated goal and a political line, anyone who reviews the sequence of ASALA's erratic, counterproductive and frequently countervailing armed actions can only be impressed by the lack of any clear direction, theoretical application or systematic perspective.

So one may ask, "If ASALA has never had a goal, political line or strategy, why has it been doing so many things in the name of the patriotic liberation struggle?" The answer to this question demands a long, detailed study of its own. It must suffice here to say that a certain insincere and influential member of ASALA has found it convenient to exploit our struggle and our people's emotions in order to serve his agenda.<sup>5</sup> (This point is taken up in *ASALA: The Reality*, and elsewhere.)

Before closing this section, one more important clarification should be made. Although ASALA as a movement never subscribed to a strategy, there were members within its ranks who strove to establish a strategic approach to the struggle. Since they failed to do so, their ideas remained ineffectual. The existence of strategic thinkers within ASALA, then, did not mean that the group as a whole had a strategic outlook.

### The A.R.F.'s Strategy

Unlike ASALA, the Dashnak Party (A.R.F.) has indeed conducted its armed campaign according to a strategy. The actual strategy of the party's central leadership at times differs in some respects from the strategy announced in the party's program. Limiting ourselves for the moment to the A.R.F.'s publicly announced strategy vis-a-vis armed action, it can be seen that this has been unrealizable and remains so.

In essence, the A.R.F.'s present strategy does not differ from the strategy it pursued at the turn of the century. The A.R.F. viewed its armed propaganda as a means of introducing the "Armenian Cause" (*Hai Tad*) into the arena of international politics. In fact, almost all of the A.R.F.'s tactics, armed or not, are still aimed at somehow convincing "Western" governments and diplomatic circles to sponsor the party's demands. As we know, these demands have usually had to do with Turkish government recognition of the genocide of 1915 and negotiations for reparations to the Armenian people.\* In this way the A.R.F. hopes to reach its professed goal of a "Free, Independent and United Armenia." It is thus the A.R.F.'s immediate goal to "force" certain governments and international organizations to formally recognize the historic reality of the 1915 genocide.

After using all legal methods at its disposal for over fifty years, however, the A.R.F. had gotten nowhere in its attempt to win over governments and sway influential circles. On the contrary, the "Armenian Question" had only



slipped further into the same historical oblivion which has put an end to many other causes. Recognizing this, the A.R.F. decided to adopt armed propaganda as a means of reversing this trend and putting the "Armenian Cause" into the headlines. By mounting attacks against Turkish diplomats and institutions, the A.R.F. hoped to reassert its waning influence and breathe new life into the struggle. These attacks had repercussions on the internal security of several countries and even on their diplomatic relations with Ankara. Thus, according to the A.R.F. position, the "international community" was confronted with the "Armenian Cause" as an issue which had to be addressed.

The adoption of armed tactics, however, did not signal a reform in A.R.F. strategy. In keeping with the A.R.F.'s long-standing strategy of appealing to "Western" powers to realize its objectives, armed propaganda was merely a last-resort tactic intended to generate international attention. In this light armed propaganda was actually a symptom of the failing strategy of which it was a part.

To understand A.R.F. strategy in general, however, we should not focus on armed propaganda. We have already mentioned the A.R.F. goal of convincing other powers of the justness of the "Armenian Question." This strategy is very dependent on foreign initiatives, and it implies a belief that the Armenian people's future cannot be determined primarily by the Armenian people themselves. The A.R.F. sees the Armenian people's job as somehow influencing other governments—especially the United States—to force the Turkish government into direct or indirect negotiations with the Armenian people's "representatives" (who presumably will reflect the views of none other than the A.R.F.!). Realizing that it is against the economic, political and strategic interests of these countries to sponsor A.R.F. demands, the party seeks to reassure "Western" governments of the A.R.F.'s "reliability" and "good intentions." Consequently, the party spends much time and energy reassuring the "West" that if an Armenia\* is created, "Western" interests in the region will not be jeopardized. In the same vein, the A.R.F. attempts to convince representatives of "Western" interests that Turkey\* is not a reliable ally and that in the long-run Turkey's "disloyal" nature will make things difficult for them. (Propagation of this strategic line is not limited to non-Armenian audiences. The role of foreign powers in the fate of the Armenian people is even emphasized in *Aztag*, *Asbarez*, *Alik* and *Troshag*—A.R.F. publications with almost exclusively Armenian readers.)

Closely connected to its strategic reliance on the "West" is the A.R.F.'s antagonism toward Soviet Armenia. We are all familiar with the notion propagated by the A.R.F. that Soviet Armenia is "occupied by the Soviet Union." At least rhetorically, the A.R.F. pursues a strategy aiming at separating Soviet Armenia from the U.S.S.R. This policy also has its origins

deep in the past. The A.R.F. has been especially bitter toward Soviet Armenia ever since 1920, when Armenian Communists toppled the corrupt and impotent government of the Republic of Armenia. Since that time, the A.R.F. has considered the Soviet Armenian state to be its enemy—and at times its primary enemy. Right down to the present day, every effort has been made to defame the Soviet system and Soviet Armenia and to minimize the economic and cultural achievements of the Soviet republic.

Because of its political and ideological isolation from Soviet Armenia, the A.R.F. finds itself in need of a sponsor. Like one hundred other small "exile" groups, the A.R.F. lends itself to exploitation by "Western" agencies with their own anti-Soviet aims.

Another characteristic of the A.R.F.'s "Western"-dependent strategy is its complete disregard for the need to transfer the Armenian armed struggle to the historic Armenian homeland, the need to build a mass-based guerrilla force closely aligned with Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries. Many appeals in A.R.F. literature and propaganda are directed to "international public opinion" and other non-Armenian audiences. Meanwhile, few appeals are directed to the Armenian people themselves, urging them to support the establishment of an armed presence on our historic homeland.

And fully in keeping with the demagogic prejudices of the party, no A.R.F. leader would seriously propose participating cooperatively in the struggle of the peoples of Turkey<sup>6</sup> against the fascist regime there.<sup>7</sup> This is more evidence that—at least publicly—the A.R.F. lacks clarity in its view of what should and must be done if we accept realism as our point of departure. While the A.R.F. reprints maps showing the borders of a supposed "Armenia" proposed in the unratified Treaty of Sevres, the party's literature ignores the native population within the borders of this "Armenia." It should be pointed out that this population, consisting of Kurds,\* Turks,\* Lazes and others, exceeds six million. One wonders what kind of Armenia the A.R.F. envisions in which Armenians\* will be an absolute—if not a miniscule—minority. The A.R.F.'s strategy ignores the need to coordinate the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle with the Kurdish national liberation struggle and the Turkish workers' struggle. It isolates the Armenian struggle from other revolutionary struggles, and it even isolates the diasporan struggle from our most natural ally, our own people in Soviet Armenia. In practice it abandons the fate of our people to the caprice of the "Western" powers, particularly the U.S.A.—and these are states whose interests are opposed to ours.

Considering the unfeasible nature of A.R.F. strategy, the question has frequently been raised whether the A.R.F.'s armed tactics are in fact intended to serve the patriotic liberation struggle. It has been observed more than once that the A.R.F.'s tactics of armed propaganda actually gave a boost to sinking morale within its ranks, and effectively reversed some of the party's



waning influence.<sup>8</sup> More than once it has been suggested that the A.R.F. was forced to adopt armed propaganda tactics, faced as the party was by a new and more militant rival. By this account, the A.R.F.'s armed activities were a parrying gesture, to discourage defection from its ranks to ASALA. Indeed, armed propaganda has given the A.R.F. a more "radical" image, an image which has just barely kept younger and more militant supporters within its political and ideological domain.

This may be true. It certainly is corroborated by the circumstance that the A.R.F. began its armed activity nine months after ASALA launched its first armed action, and its armed actions ceased when ASALA's armed actions ceased. And it is also true that ASALA's actions were perceived to be a threat to the A.R.F., appealing as they did to its youthful members and supporters.

In our opinion, however, ASALA never grew into a force capable of seriously challenging A.R.F. dominance in the diaspora. What truly does represent a threat, however, is the general discontent and frustration among young Armenians in general, including the A.R.F. membership. Certainly, one of the effects of the A.R.F.'s armed propaganda was to give the party more credibility among its own followers. Nevertheless, considering the fact that in October 1975 many people were already crediting the A.R.F. for ASALA's activities, and the fact that the A.R.F. as an institution in the diaspora (particularly in Lebanon) had access to resources and traditional patronage that ASALA could not hope to gain, it would be more accurate to say that the A.R.F.'s decision to begin armed propaganda was motivated at least equally by its need for a different tactic linked to its (unworkable and clearly reactionary) strategy to "liberate Armenia."<sup>9</sup>

### **A Word about the Correct Strategy for the Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement**

Having pointed out the strategic inadequacies of both ASALA and the A.R.F., it remains for us to advance an alternative strategy for our struggle. At this point, however, we encounter a difficulty which we can and must surmount: it will not be possible to formulate our own strategy in detail until we have ironed out our political line. For this reason, our most pressing immediate task is to develop a political program.

All the details cannot be included here; however, the general guidelines for struggle which we present below should be very close in its broad outline, to our final strategy:

Let us start by stating what we already know: The Armenian people's national and human rights were most seriously violated during the genocide which climaxed between 1915 and 1917. This genocide was authored and executed by the legal state authority at the time, the chauvinistic Young Turk Union and Progress regime. As a result of this genocide one and one-half

million Armenians were slaughtered and hundreds of thousands of others were forcibly expelled from their homeland. Thus, the Armenian homeland—the land where the Armenian people originated and where, during three thousand years of history, the Armenian people developed as a distinct cultural entity and finally as a nation—was emptied of the Armenian people.

This violation of our national rights by Turkey continues until this day, since Armenians of the diaspora\* are forbidden, directly and indirectly, by the Turkish regime to return to their homeland, to exercise their national, political, economic and human rights there. Thus, the restitution of the rights of the Armenian people rests in the establishment of Armenian national self-determination in lands historically inhabited by and associated with the Armenian people, especially those areas in immediate proximity to Soviet Armenia.

By "Armenian national self-determination" we understand more than one single possible system or arrangement. The final arrangement will depend upon the practical (as opposed to the simply emotional) attachment of the Armenian people to their homeland, as this attachment is manifested in their mobilization and resultant capacity to carry the struggle forward.

As a very minimum, we declare that any diasporan Armenian\* must have the right to freely return to "Western Armenia" (i.e., those areas of the Armenian homeland currently under the direct jurisdiction of the Turkish state), and to establish herself as a native there, enjoying equal and full political, economic, national and human rights on a par with all other inhabitants. To ensure these rights the newly established revolutionary socialist state must provide material assistance to Armenians who wish to return to their homeland. In addition, Armenians must be sufficiently represented in governing bodies as a national minority,\* and local administration of Armenian areas must be left to the local population on all feasible levels. Furthermore, if Armenians were to constitute no more than a national minority in "Western Armenia" and those regions were to remain a part of a new revolutionary Turkey or Kurdistan,\* the Armenian minority should enjoy a special relationship with Soviet Armenia. This relationship would encompass cultural and social realms, as well as economic and other realms. The specific nature and extent of this special relationship would be determined by the size of the Armenian minority, as well as the conditions of the new revolutionary state and the initiatives of Soviet Armenia. In any case, all efforts must be made to develop this relationship to the fullest extent possible.

This is our minimal goal of self-determination. Until this minimum goal is realized, our patriotic liberation struggle will not have succeeded and shall continue on all levels and in full force.

It should be pointed out, however, that there exists the possibility (if not the probability) of achieving more than this minimum level of self-determi-



nation. Broadly speaking, there are two alternative arrangements within which to secure Armenian national self-determination beyond the minimum definition. These are: (1) an Armenian-administered autonomous region within a newly created revolutionary state of majority non-Armenian population; and (2) the separation of some territories currently within the borders of the Turkish state, and their full integration into Soviet Armenia, while at the same time securing the national minority rights of all other Armenians who choose to remain in other parts of Turkey or Kurdistan.

The minimum definition and the further possibilities we have mentioned warrant further discussion. Let us start by pointing out that the familiar emotional appeals to "liberate Armenia" skirt historic realities. While many of us feel a strong emotional attachment to our homeland, we should not allow emotions to deter us from speaking of things the way they really are. It should be remembered that this very surrender to emotion has led to insane and counterproductive atrocities on the scale of the Ankara and Istanbul suicide assaults,<sup>10</sup> as well as the Orly bombing and the Lisbon disaster.<sup>11</sup> By surrendering to emotions we enable the A.R.F. and sloganeers like "Hagop Hagopian" to lead thousands of well-intentioned patriots down a path which does not lead to Armenia, and to sacrifice the lives of young fighters in campaigns which directly contradict the interests of the Armenian people. If we are to achieve even the minimum requirements for Armenian national self-determination, we must approach problems in a serious and sober manner.

As a first step, we should recognize that the Armenian people's fight for national self-determination is first and foremost the duty and task of the Armenian people themselves. We do not believe in benevolent friends, the inevitable triumph of justice, or covertly and cleverly manipulating the superpowers. *If we are to achieve national self-determination, then we ourselves, the Armenian people, will have to fight for it.* We believe in the power of organized masses and in the capacity of our people to determine their own future. We believe in revolution.

Of course, we will inevitably coordinate our efforts with other revolutionary forces, especially the Kurdish national liberation struggle and the Turkish working class struggle. It is possible that these forces will assist us in advancing toward our goal. Nevertheless, one thing should be clear from a review of the current situation in the region of our homeland: the determining factor in our struggle will be our ability to fight for our own rights. The Kurdish people\* live in Kurdistan. Sooner or later they will defeat their oppressors and achieve national self-determination. Likewise, the Turkish people\* live in Turkey, and they will sooner or later overthrow the fascist regime and establish a revolutionary state. The same inevitability, however, does not apply to our case.

We must come to terms with a fact which we often repeat without fully comprehending: the genocide, the deportations and seventy years of diaspora have *changed our history*. Those who still entertain grand hopes of one day "liberating Western Armenia" are caught in a double bind: If we are one day to achieve national self-determination, then realistically speaking, diasporan Armenians themselves must take the initiative to win it. And yet at the same time, we live isolated from each other, in far-flung diasporan communities. This situation greatly diminishes our potential as a fighting force. In view of these two realities, the fanciful maps and pipe dreams of the past should be abandoned, in favor of more realistic goals. It is time we spoke frankly about a taboo subject: historical developments since 1915 have rendered more distant than ever the reunification of the whole Armenian homeland. The sooner we face this fact, the sooner we can set out with full force to realize the goal of Armenian national self-determination.

A fourth generation of diasporan Armenians is now coming of age. Properly speaking, many of these "Armenians" should no longer be considered Armenian, for the simple reason that they do not consider themselves to be more Armenian than North American, French or Australian. Still others who call themselves Armenian are actually more tied to their respective "host" countries (even culturally and socially) than they are to "Armenian-ness." Furthermore, Armenian emigration from southwest Asia has diminished our most strategic and relatively dense communities. Largely as a result of the raging war in Lebanon, for example, our community in that country has decreased from about 200,000 in 1975 to perhaps some 150,000 today.<sup>12</sup> And since there is no end in sight to that war, we should expect the trend of emigration from Lebanon to continue. Since 1977—again largely due to political unrest, economic insecurity, war and reactionary policies—our community in Iran has dropped from approximately 200,000 to approximately 150,000. Similarly, emigration has reduced the number of Armenians in Turkey to probably somewhere below 100,000. Emigration has gnawed off a large portion of our community in Syria, also, while the Armenian community in Iraq can no longer be considered of any strategic importance. And perhaps most ominously, tens of thousands of Armenians have been emigrating from the Soviet Socialist Republic in recent years.

The record indicates that most of the emigrants have settled in western Europe and the United States, where cultural assimilation takes its toll most rapidly. By now, it is safe to say that the vast majority of those who have emigrated to the "West" would never return to southwest Asia, even if the wars and upheavals were to cease tomorrow at twelve noon. With every passing year, more of these Armenians become more firmly inserted into their "host" countries, thus removing themselves further and further from



their Armenian heritage. The moral of this story is clear: *Time is not on our side.*

Recognizing this, we can better identify our main source of leaders and recruits. Those who most directly feel the cultural and social contradictions of the diaspora are likely to be most strongly devoted to solving this contradiction. For this reason, the diasporan Armenians most highly motivated to struggle for national self-determination will be drawn, by and large, from local toiling classes, the unemployed and the poor. These compatriots suffer from both cultural and social contradictions, as well as economic exploitation. Thus, they have the least to lose and the most to gain by fighting for Armenian national self-determination. Because they are likely to be the most steadfast, and because they are likely to make up the greater part of our ranks, they should be expected to lead the struggle.

The fact is that three major options are open to progressive diasporan Armenians today: (1) to struggle for Armenian national self-determination; (2) to immigrate to Soviet Armenia; and (3) to adopt her native country (thereby accepting that she is no longer effectively an Armenian), and to participate in the native progressive movements there.

We are concerned here with those who are most likely to choose the first option. When we say that the Armenian people's fight for national self-determination remains first and foremost the duty and task of the Armenian people themselves, it is mainly these Armenians about whom we are speaking (unless and until Soviet Armenia begins taking initiatives). These are the strongest, most resilient and clear-sighted members of the diaspora. They are least likely to undertake struggle as a hobby, or as a way of satisfying a thirst for adventure or Turkish blood.<sup>13</sup>

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In view of our strategic goal, and keeping in mind that objective conditions within "Western Armenia" have made it necessary to re-evaluate the future status of that region vis-a-vis the Armenians, we have argued that the much-vaunted "Free, Independent and United Armenia" is neither attainable nor preferable, from the position of the interests of the Armenian people. Propagating this chimerical goal only depletes our already limited human and material resources and wastes time which we cannot afford to waste.<sup>14</sup>

Our minimum definition of Armenian national self-determination, by contrast, is attainable. In fact, there is already at least one revolutionary Turkish organization, the Leninists of the Turkish Communist Party (T.K.P.-L.), which formally recognizes something close to (but slightly short of) this minimum definition.<sup>15</sup> Yet other Turkish and Kurdish revolutionary organizations have begun to think very seriously about the

position of the Armenian people and have begun discussing it in their publications, even though they have not yet taken a clear decisive position on this subject.

At this point, we can almost hear one of our more opportunistic compatriots saying: "Well, if this is the case, then why even bother fighting for our rights? After Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries do all the dirty work and set up a revolutionary socialist state, we could just saunter through the door one fine morning, and exercise our national self-determination."

This sort of "cleverness" has never served the interests of our nation, and there are several reasons why the present case is no exception. For one thing, as we have already mentioned, time is not on our side. The longer we wait to mobilize our people in the struggle, the greater a toll will be taken by assimilation. As a result, there will be fewer "Armenians" in the diaspora to inhabit "Western Armenia," and we will have less influence. On the other hand, by means of militant organizing and raising political awareness among our people, more diasporan Armenians will be likely to feel a greater attachment to Armenia than to the U.S.A., France or Argentina. Only by mobilizing for struggle can we hope to *guarantee* that at least the minimum conditions for Armenian national self-determination will continue to exist, as the storm clouds of revolution gather over Turkey.

Of course, we ourselves must fight to hasten the establishment of a new revolutionary socialist system—a system which is in the best interest of Armenians, as much as anyone else. In the meantime, there are political tasks we need to accomplish in relation to our Turkish comrades. As was mentioned above, only one or two Turkish revolutionary organizations to date have formally recognized certain of our rights, and these only come close to a satisfactory minimal definition of a solution to our problem.<sup>16</sup> It should also be added that, although our comrades, the Leninists of the Turkish Communist Party, are politically mature and committed, they represent a relatively small part of the Left forces opposed to the Turkish regime. The remainder of the Turkish organizations, including the biggest ones, have yet to formally recognize our national rights. (In fact, some organizations which have formally recognized the right of the *Kurdish* people to national self-determination have failed as yet to apply this principle in practice.)

The only way to advance our political demands among our allies and to guarantee their acceptance *in practice* is by comprising a political force in our own right. No amount of moral admonishment or "indirect pressure" will guarantee that our demands are met, in the absence of our own organizational presence on the ground. Only by struggling ourselves can we convince our allies of our attachment to the revolution, to the land, and to our national rights. And only by struggling ourselves will we have the chance to impose our demands, in the face of all reactionary opposition.



And finally, there is at least one more reason we need to work to realize our own demands: If diasporan Armenians do not initiate the struggle now, then any chance of eventually securing Soviet Armenia's assistance will be almost nil. Considering the record of Soviet policy over the years, it is extremely unlikely that the U.S.S.R. or Soviet Armenia would extend assistance to us in any form unless they received a demand from within Turkey. Only by mobilizing ourselves now will we be able to create conditions that might later facilitate initiatives on the part of Soviet Armenia and Armenians of the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

If diasporan Armenians participate as a political force in the struggle against the Turkish state, our minimum goal of self-determination is attainable. Furthermore, if we struggle properly, we may be able to exceed our minimal goal. This possibility depends on many factors, including how much force we will be able to muster within "Western Armenia." This is critical. The only way we will be able to convince our allies of the necessity of our goals, and impose our people's rights in the face of our enemies, is by constituting a struggling military force (however small) which coordinates its efforts with other revolutionary forces within our homeland. Until we constitute such a force, we will not be able to guarantee even our minimum goal. The stronger our armed struggle becomes within our homeland, the greater the influence we will exert on the future administration of that territory.

By remaining outside of Turkey, no matter how much noise we may make or armed propaganda we undertake, we will not be able to substantially effect conditions on the ground in Turkey. This is why we say that, until now, we have failed to initiate our true struggle—namely, popularly supported participation as an armed force within Turkey.<sup>18</sup>

This is why armed propaganda should be considered only a tactic, and certainly not the essence of the struggle. Armed propaganda is appropriate during the initial stages of our effort to mobilize the diaspora. It could also be deployed intermittently, as a tactic to further mobilize the diaspora, bring international attention to the struggle in Turkey, raise the morale of our *fedaiis* fighting inside Turkey, eliminate key enemy figures, and collect funds to help finance our struggle within Turkey. Armed propaganda may generate enthusiasm, but if it is not used to popularize our struggle and to lay the groundwork for our participation in the armed struggle within Turkey, then it is of no use to us. In spite of ASALA and A.R.F. rhetoric, armed propaganda is not a tactic which can "force" foreign powers to support our political demands; nor does it deal "lethal blows" to the Turkish regime.

Let us return to the question of armed struggle within the borders of Turkey. Here, it must be acknowledged that many difficult challenges confront us when we consider practical steps toward establishing an

organizational presence within this part of our homeland. The first challenge is connected to the fact that there are almost no Armenians at all in eastern Turkey. In view of this fact, who is supposed to give us logistical help, food or shelter? This problem is even more serious than it appears at first sight, since many of our militants will not speak Turkish or Kurdish, and those who do will not speak it as natives of that region do. It will be obvious to any villager, shepherd or smuggler that we are "different." Only the most politicized natives will accept us—and there are not many of them right now. Either for fear of reprisals by the Turkish army or because of old chauvinist sentiments, some natives will be apt to inform the government of our whereabouts, lead us into ambushes, or even take direct action against us. This danger is likely to increase if—or rather *when*—the Turkish army begins shelling villages in areas of armed resistance. No one will want to suffer because "troublemakers" from abroad have come to "take their land." Furthermore, the winters are so harsh in that region that it will be impossible to survive without shelter and provisions, which cannot be secured without the help of the native population. In short, if we are up against a hostile local population, then we will be committing suicide by going into such regions.

We might overcome this challenge by cooperating in a mutually beneficial way with Turkish and Kurdish organizations. (Indeed, cooperation with Turkish and Kurdish allies will be necessary in order for us to retain our independence as a political and military force.) It might be possible, for example, to agree with them upon seasonal and regional activity, or on our limited presence, until a key point in time when the armed resistance transforms itself into an all-out offensive against the state.<sup>19</sup>

It is neither appropriate nor prudent to go into details here. We can summarize much of what has been said so far, however, by recognizing that immense problems exist in establishing an Armenian armed force in our homeland. The possible solutions all have their difficult aspects and drawbacks, but the challenges are not insurmountable.

This, however, brings us to a second problem: with whom should we cooperate? At present, there are over seventy progressive and revolutionary organizations of varying sizes and political orientations in Turkey. How are we to choose our allies from among all these groups?

Well, there are many criteria for distinguishing genuine allies from unreliable ones. First of all, the literature, political lines and actual practice of organizations can be studied and compared. We can begin a dialog with as many groups as possible, so as to acquaint ourselves firsthand with their political programs, leaders, cadres and members. We can investigate their stances in relation to our struggle, as well as their understanding of their own and other struggles. This takes time, but no one is expecting the Turkish state to be cast into crisis in the immediate future. As we get to know each group



better, and as each group gets to know us better, it will become clearer as to how much we can cooperate with each other, and on what levels that cooperation should take place.

The second factor which might open up possibilities beyond our minimum goal is the role of Soviet Armenia and the Soviet Union. We do not want to sound exceedingly optimistic on this point; this subject must be approached realistically. However, realism does not rule out such a possibility. Especially if the armed struggle initiated by diasporan Armenians were to succeed in gaining a strong foothold in Turkey.

There are many ways in which Soviet Armenia could conceivably aid our struggle, short of sending in the Red Army. It could assist us financially, logistically or medically. Hopefully, it would extend political and military support, too. (Military help could come in the form of supplies—or, even more importantly, in the form of volunteers from Soviet Armenia.) Or, as is more likely, it could help us indirectly, by supporting our various tasks in the diaspora. Areas of assistance could include: cultural work, research and publication grants, financial and logistical aid to local movements, etc. Without listing all the ways in which Soviet Armenia could support our struggle, these few examples should indicate that some forms of assistance from Soviet Armenian are not far-fetched or exceedingly ambitious.

Depending on the exact nature and extent of possible Soviet Armenian help, our struggle could take on very different proportions, and much more than our minimum goal could be achieved. On the other hand, if Soviet Armenia were not to extend any aid, then our minimum goal could still be attainable, by falling back solely on our own resources and by pursuing a correct political approach. (Of course, it is doubtful that we will ever succeed in integrating certain areas close to the Soviet Armenian border into Soviet Armenia without some kind of support from Soviet Armenia and the Soviet Union.)

The third factor which may open possibilities for a form of Armenian self-determination exceeding our minimal goal consists in historical developments which for the most part will not be within our control. These include international and regional developments, as well as developments within Turkey. Deepening economic crises in the U.S.A. or France, for example, could result in accelerated politicization of the largest diasporan communities, and this could provide a substantial boost to our struggle.

This one example, however, is sufficient to point up the importance of redoubling organizational efforts immediately: if we do not take steps now to mobilize resources at hand for our struggle, then it is unlikely that we will be able to turn future developments to our advantage. In the hypothetical example we cited, for instance, diasporan Armenians affected by such crises are likely to respond by joining local workers' struggles, rather than lending

their support to the struggle for Armenian self-determination in present-day Turkey.

Regional developments in Southwest Asia also might be conducive to our efforts. Future developments in Iran, or the progress of the Kurdish national liberation movement in Iraq and Iran, for example, could have far-reaching repercussions for our struggle. And, of course, developments in Turkey will be particularly crucial. The rate at which the Turkish working class is politicized; the unity of Turkish progressive forces; the rate at which the Kurdish national liberation struggle progresses; the unity of Kurdish forces—these are only a few of the important factors which will affect our struggle.

These examples should be sufficient to indicate why we must do our very best to coordinate our efforts with all revolutionary forces in the region, and especially with those inside Turkey. It is obvious that we cannot resist the Turkish regime alone. On the other hand, it is also true that we have genuine allies with whom we share a common enemy and many of the same goals.

Summarizing, we can say that our formulation of minimum Armenian demands for national self-determination represents a realistic goal which would secure the national rights of our people in our currently occupied homeland. This minimum goal is achievable solely through the resources of our people in the diaspora, provided: (a) those who are most dedicated to the struggle are properly organized along a realistic political line; and (b) large numbers of other diasporan Armenians are allowed to participate in any capacity in which they could be useful, under the leadership of the most dedicated compatriots. If the diaspora is efficiently mobilized along these lines, then no "foreign benefactors" or even aid from Soviet Armenia will be necessary to achieve our minimum goal. On the other hand, a number of other developments may bring a more extensive solution into reach: greater numbers of Armenians of the diaspora may dedicate themselves to the struggle; Soviet Armenia may contribute decisively to the struggle; or global or regional developments may serve to strengthen our struggle. In any of these scenarios, it may be possible to achieve some form of national self-determination which exceeds our minimum goal.

Now let us turn back to the problem facing us: how to mobilize the diaspora. This problem involves a number of tasks, which will be listed here and then discussed in the balance of the present article: (1) We need to organize those compatriots who are most dedicated to the struggle, bringing them together within a vanguard force with a clear political line; (2) We need to mobilize a broad section of the diaspora to provide various forms of back-up assistance to the vanguard forces; (3) We need to mobilize as many compatriots as possible in two key countries—Turkey and Iran; (4) We need to cultivate cooperative relations with other revolutionary forces in the region, especially forces advancing the Turkish working class struggle and



the Kurdish national liberation struggle in Turkey; (5) We need to defend diasporan communities from local oppression; and (6) We need to maintain friendly relations on all levels with Soviet Armenia.

At present, our most pressing task is the first. The most dedicated diasporan Armenians can be expected to include working-class Armenians who are still attached to their national heritage, members of other classes who are aware of the contradiction of living in diaspora, and patriotic students with a mature political understanding of the demands of our people. Today, some compatriots are directly or indirectly involved in efforts to initiate our patriotic liberation struggle. Many others are currently inactive, due to our lack of organization and, consequently, their insufficient political education. Our immediate task is to regroup as many of these elements as possible—especially the experienced ones—around a clear, detailed and realizable political program.

At the same time, it will be necessary to draw as many new recruits as possible into the struggle. This can be done by various means of propaganda, including open meetings, demonstrations, periodicals, and very selective armed propaganda. The new recruits, of course, should be organized under the political line of the more experienced comrades. There are many capacities in which newer, less dedicated recruits would be of assistance, including financial and logistical support, community organizing, propaganda, and so on. New recruits who achieve an exceptional level of political understanding should be inducted into the ranks of the vanguard, and some of these might even be prepared to participate in the armed struggle in Turkey, as soon as it has been initiated.

It has already been noted that two diasporan communities will be exceptionally important in relation to our struggle: the communities of Turkey and Iran. Only by organizing the Armenians of Turkey and Iran will other diasporan Armenians be able to reach our battlefield in present-day eastern Turkey. The Armenian community of Turkey is crucial because only it can provide us with an independent means of operation in Turkey. In addition, Iran's 150,000-strong Armenian community—a community in close proximity to northeastern Turkey and Soviet Armenia—has an especially important strategic value.

Although these two communities are of crucial strategic interest to us, they will prove to be especially difficult to organize. The fact that in Turkey there is such a small and dispersed number of Armenians within a much larger population; the fact that Turkey is a police state, and that Armenians are singled out for particularly heavy repression; the fact that there is much surveillance of foreign residents—all of these facts and many others constitute formidable obstacles to organizing the Armenian community in Turkey. Furthermore, these difficulties are magnified in the case of a movement

which is, initially at least, externally based. It will be necessary, therefore, to begin by organizing Armenians from Turkey who reside in other countries such as France, West Germany and Holland. After these have been sufficiently organized, it will be possible for them (aided by other compatriots) to begin organizational efforts within the borders of the Turkish state.

Although conditions in Iran are also difficult, there is, nevertheless, a greater possibility for extensive organizing. For one thing, there are politicized and experienced compatriots in Iran, and the Iranian-Armenian community has a high proportion of working class, unemployed and culturally attached Armenians. The war and the economic crisis in Iran, coupled with the reactionary policies of the regime and the experience of the successful uprising against the despotic Shah—all of these factors may result in a high proportion of Iranian-Armenians among the most dedicated recruits.

Cultivating cooperative relations with other revolutionary forces in the region, especially those in Turkey, should also be accelerated by taking advantage of the presence of leaders and cadres of Turkish and Kurdish organizations in Europe and elsewhere. We must approach those we have not yet approached, and we must strengthen our ties with those whom we already know. Turkish and Kurdish comrades should be exposed to our propaganda. We should engage them in personal and organizational dialog, teach them about our struggle, and learn about their struggles. Cooperation can begin by participating in each others' mass actions, such as demonstrations, solidarity meetings and the like. Through discussion and practical cooperation we can determine our common political ground. Then, with a higher level of mutual understanding, we may be able to begin discussing ways to coordinate actions in Turkey. This process is likely to be less difficult, but it is of the utmost importance, so we must be patient and begin serious organized efforts.

We are all aware that we will not achieve even our minimum goal of national self-determination in the near future. This will only be achieved after a long struggle. Meanwhile, it is the responsibility of any truly mature Armenian political movement to defend the rights of all Armenians wherever they may be found. This means that our organizing efforts in each diasporan "host" country should take into account the economic, social, cultural or political plight of the local community. We cannot afford to adopt the isolationist policy exemplified by the familiar claims that "We don't belong in this country, so let the locals do as they please," or "This country isn't ours, so let's not get mixed up in the conflicts here." In practice, this isolationism has left our people depoliticized, oppressed and in constant supplication to non-Armenian circles which by default have become the only means of solving Armenian community problems.



So, in addition to supporting our patriotic liberation movement, part of our task in each community should be to organize our people in defense of our local rights. These two domains are interrelated: work in one domain should reinforce work in the other. Defending diasporan communities from local oppression is one of the most practical, immediate means of bringing each diasporan community within a larger movement. In addition, by participating in local struggles, we gain invaluable political and organizational experience for our patriotic liberation struggle.

The means of defense will vary from one community to the next. In Lebanon, for example, the defense of the community will inevitably include the option of armed resistance, as well as the organization of relief aid, social programs and economic aid for those in need. In the U.S.A., by contrast, the interests of our community would be better represented by cooperating as an Armenian movement in broader progressive movements, such as the movements for women's rights, disarmament and human rights, and against U.S. military intervention abroad and racism.

In addition to cooperation with local non-Armenian progressive forces in defense of our diasporan communities, local efforts should be bolstered by support from other diasporan communities. This support could take the form of material aid, as well as human resources. The experiences of the Lebanese-Armenian community provides a ready illustration of the importance of pan-diaspora assistance. So far, this community has been subject to nine long years of war, during which time homes, businesses and schools have been destroyed. Lebanese Armenians have been subjected to organized Phalangist aggression, extended periods of shelling, extortion taxes and innumerable other hardships. The standard of living has plummeted; the level of education has fallen; health care is abysmal; wages have lagged far below soaring inflation; unemployment is rampant; and, of course, the physical security of the community is under constant threat. Contributions have been solicited from other diasporan communities (the Armenian S.S.R. has been most forthcoming in providing both material and human assistance), but much of the money and material aid collected has not reached those for whom it was intended. Moreover, whatever inadequate aid has actually reached the Lebanese-Armenian community has not appreciably slowed emigration or improved the security and life of the community. On the contrary, the situation has gotten worse.

In the case of Lebanon, where the war has decimated the whole country, it would be unreasonable to expect the Armenian community to somehow slide through without its share of losses. Nevertheless, damage to the community could and should have been ameliorated in a more satisfactory manner than has so far been the case. Diasporan aid to the Lebanese-Armenian community should include human resources, in the form of

qualified volunteers—teachers, doctors, social workers and construction workers. The presence of volunteers in the life of the community would also be an important boost to the community's morale, which is at rock bottom. At the same time, experience gained through volunteer work of this sort could prove to be valuable later in the struggle.

Friendly, close interaction with Soviet Armenia is also a must. Throughout seventy years of diaspora, Soviet Armenia has been the cultural backbone of all diasporan communities. Soviet Armenia, and the cultural expressions emanating from Soviet Armenia, constitute a common point of reference for Armenians throughout diaspora, whether they be in Uruguay, Canada, Syria or India. The closer the relationship between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia, the stronger the national identity of Armenians of the diaspora.

Another reason for cultivating a close relationship with the Armenian S.S.R. has already been mentioned: as the relief aid effort to the Armenians of Lebanon shows, Soviet Armenia can assist us considerably in securing the welfare of diasporan communities. By organizing ourselves responsibly, we will be in position to convince Soviet Armenian authorities to dispatch a doctor for victims in Bourj Hamoud, a tractor for unemployed villagers in northwestern Iran, or a lecturer for students in the U.S.A.

And finally, one additional reason for cultivating a close interaction between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia should be mentioned, at least in passing: This sort of interaction may facilitate future Soviet Armenian support of the patriotic liberation movement.

Our organizational efforts must be accompanied by the preparation of cadres. This is one of the most important tasks of building a militant movement. The military and political direction of our struggle depends on the preparation of a homogeneous, experienced and highly motivated body of cadres.

Prospective cadres should be distinguished on the basis of their initiative, dedication and practical activity as rank-and-file members of the movement. Once identified, candidates should undergo supplementary political, organizational and military education. For this purpose, our movement must develop a rigorous standardized program, adopt a reading list and prepare special textbooks when necessary.<sup>20</sup> With the necessary program and materials, we will be able to prepare cadres with a homogeneous political outlook, whether they hail from the United States, France, Lebanon or Iran. (By contrast, rank-and-file members of local movements in the diaspora should not be expected to conform as closely as the cadres to the vanguard's political line. Because of widely varying conditions throughout the diaspora, we should expect and tolerate variations of outlook from one community to the next, as long as these variations are consistent with our broad points of unity.)



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Let us now tie the main points together in an outline of what we consider to be the correct strategy for our struggle for national self-determination. Such a struggle must be based on the following principles:

- (1) Accepting our minimum goal for Armenian national self-determination, while acknowledging the possibility of achieving more than this goal;
- (2) Preparing a clear, detailed, comprehensive political program which defines the duties and responsibilities of members of the patriotic liberation movement and specifies the command structure of the movement;
- (3) Relying on our own people and resources;
- (4) Interacting closely with Soviet Armenia;
- (5) Coordinating efforts with other revolutionary forces—especially with the Turkish working class struggle and the Kurdish national liberation struggle in Turkey—to sustain a popularly supported guerrilla war of long duration in Turkey (this also demands the special organization of the Armenian communities in Turkey and Iran);
- (6) Mobilizing Armenians of the diaspora, particularly our most dedicated compatriots, into the patriotic liberation struggle; and
- (7) Taking practical steps to secure the welfare of diasporan communities, while at the same time framing local activities within the context of the patriotic liberation movement.

*Melkonian completed an earlier version of the following essay in September 1985, while living underground in Paris. The text first appeared in Kaytzer in 1986.*

*As with other writings which appear here, this one reads like part of a draft of a political manifesto or program. By publishing these thoughts in this form, Melkonian wrote, he hoped to submit them to discussion and correction by a wider audience.*

## THE ORIENTATION OF OUR GOAL

### The Goal

National self-determination for the Armenian people and a united Armenian national entity.

The first part of this goal—some form of Armenian national self-determination in the Armenian homeland—must be achieved in order to make a united Armenian national entity a reality.

### Description of the Present Situation

#### Armenians in the U.S.S.R.

The Armenian S.S.R. already constitutes a part of the Armenian homeland where the Armenian people have the possibility of achieving national self-determination. Accordingly, Soviet Armenia is the modern political, economic, cultural and administrative homeland of the Armenian people. The Armenian populations in Akhalkalak, Karabagh and—quantitatively less significantly—Nakhichevan also inhabit different portions of the Armenian homeland. In spite of this, however, these regions have been incorporated into non-Armenian Soviet Republics (Akhalkalak into the Georgian S.S.R., and the other two regions into the Azerbaijan S.S.R.). For this reason, they are currently cut off from the mainstream of Armenian life in the Armenian S.S.R. Outside of the Armenian S.S.R., Akhalkalak, Karabagh and Nakhichevan, there are about one million persons of Armenian origin in the Soviet diaspora. Although some of them enjoy certain rights as minorities in some localities, they do not directly take part in the life and development of the Armenian S.S.R., and are subject to gradual assimilation. It is reasonable to assume, then, that eventually Armenians in the Soviet diaspora will be assimilated into the local populations, unless they opt to relocate to their Soviet Armenian homeland.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that many of the Armenians now in Soviet Armenia and other parts of the U.S.S.R. are also descendants of the refugees who were



forced, under threat of annihilation, to flee their homes in "Western Armenia." Thus, many of them still feel attached to that part of their homeland currently within Turkish borders.

### The Non-Soviet Diaspora

An even higher proportion of Armenians outside the U.S.S.R. trace their origins to the western part of the Armenian homeland. Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora have been subjected to a variety of conditions which differ greatly from those obtaining within the Soviet Union. Broadly speaking, the first generation of Armenians who fled the massacres and genocide found themselves face-to-face with racial discrimination, social injustice, cultural conflicts, severe economic exploitation and frequently even physical abuse. With the second and third generations, very significant changes occurred throughout the diaspora. For one thing, there was a general tendency toward achievement of petty-bourgeois status,<sup>22</sup> while racial discrimination against them decreased. Perhaps as a partial result of their new-found comfort in the diaspora, the natural tendency to assimilate intensified and accelerated. This tendency has, to different degrees, affected most diasporan Armenians. Hence, while today the physical existence and economic security of most diasporan Armenians are no longer in question,<sup>23</sup> their cultural identity is rapidly evaporating. The process of assimilation has already taken a great toll, transforming many Armenians of the diaspora into non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry.\* At present, assimilation is accelerating more or less rapidly, depending on which "host" country of the diaspora we consider. Most diasporan Armenians may still retain some degree of subjective attachment to the Armenian people and homeland; nevertheless, assimilation is daily transforming the geographical gap between diasporan communities into a social and cultural gap. Despite all attempts by traditional institutions in the diaspora to "preserve Armenian-ness," the process of assimilation proceeds apace.

Most diasporan Armenians are objectively tied to their respective localities and integrated (or at least semi-integrated) into their respective "host" societies. Also, broadly speaking, diasporan Armenians are independent of—and in some places downright isolated from—each other. This is true of relations among various diasporan communities, as well as between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia. What is more, individuals and families within a community tend to be isolated from other members of the community, in large part because intra-communal economic relations are missing in the diaspora. Instead, diasporan Armenians are inserted into the economic and class divisions of their respective countries and societies in the same manner as the local non-Armenian populations.

The ideological state of diasporan Armenians varies widely, and indeed it

is still subject to a great deal of variation from a number of directions. Currently, there are significant numbers of persons of Armenian origin, especially in North and South America and Western Europe, who are totally attached to their local societies. These increasing numbers of people should not really be counted as Armenian in anything but name.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, there is a significant number of people in diaspora (especially in Iran, Syria and Lebanon) who, despite having been born and raised in diaspora, are still subjectively more attached to the Armenian homeland than to any other homeland. Between these two "extremes" lie perhaps the bulk of diasporan Armenians, who are subjectively attached to both their localities and the Armenian homeland. They are socially and culturally integrated into local societies, but they retain some emotional attachment to their Armenian past, as well as some folkloric remnants of Armenian culture.

Currently, subjective changes in the diaspora have been taking place in two generally opposed directions: one of continued assimilation and the other of progressive politicization within the context of the Armenian liberation struggle. The first is and has been very much the dominant current in diaspora; however, the latter current, though representing a small minority of diasporan Armenians, is new and holds some promise for the future. Meanwhile, *hayababbanum* [Armenian cultural conservatism] has never been anything but woefully inadequate. At best, *hayababbanum* has been a temporary stopgap—a stopgap which contravenes the inevitable tendency of human beings to adapt to their surroundings, and is now obsolete. Now more than ever, attempts to fence off "Armenian environments" for the indefinite future are recognized to have been unrealistic in the first place.

From these general facts it can be concluded that the existence of diasporan Armenians as Armenians is impossible in the long run (or perhaps even in the not-so-long run). Furthermore, the only current in the diaspora which is culturally, socially and politically dynamic—the current of progressive politicization—will also fail if it does not result in the return of diasporan Armenians to the Armenian homeland. Only within the historic Armenian homeland can the Armenian people develop their own distinct culture and exist as a collective unit, as a nation.

The case of Armenians in Turkey demands special attention. The Armenian people currently constitute one of many national minorities in Turkey. Although relatively few Armenians remain in Turkey (about 80,000), they are nonetheless very important. Many of these Armenians live in Istanbul, while few still live in that part of the historic Armenian homeland which is controlled by the Turkish state. Significantly, however, they represent the only Armenian community remaining within the geopolitical sphere of our national enemy, the chauvinist Turkish state.



In keeping with a narrowly racist definition of "Turkish national interests," all non-Turkish peoples and minorities in Turkey are subjected to cultural deprivation and harsh restrictive measures. As is well known, these measures frequently take the form of physical repression: imprisonment, torture and even execution. Armenians in Turkey, however, are subjected to exceptionally harsh repression. There is clearly a campaign by the Turkish government not only to control the Armenian community politically, but to coercively integrate Armenians into the Turkish nation\* by divesting them of their cultural and national identity. Through a long-standing policy of "Turkification," Armenians in Turkey are discouraged and even punished if they attempt to develop their culture or retain their national identity. Just as Ankara's officials refer to Kurds as "Mountain Turks," so also Armenians are referred to as "Christian Turks."

The Turkish state's chauvinism, coupled with the heavy class exploitation inherent in Turkey's capitalist system, make the Turkish regime both the national enemy of the Armenian people in general and the class enemy of Armenian workers in Turkey and whatever few unassimilated peasants may be left there. For this reason, a large proportion of Armenians in Turkey have an interest in establishing a progressive socialist regime that will eliminate class exploitation and guarantee their national rights.

By way of summary, the present situation of the Armenian people may be described broadly as follows:

(1) The greater part of the Armenian people is to be found in the U.S.S.R. Of these, approximately 300,000 live within areas of the historic Armenian homeland adjacent to the frontiers of the Armenian S.S.R., but currently within the administrative jurisdiction of the Georgian and Azerbaijani S.S.R.'s, and about one million others live within various parts of the Soviet diaspora. Those in Soviet Armenia are currently building greater democracy, which will be an important step in developing national self-determination. Those in Artsakh are struggling for reunification with Soviet Armenia, to make national self-determination possible, while the very few Armenians left in Nakhichevan may hope to ride things out until something can be arranged. In Akhalkalak cultural pressure is much less severe, but reunification with Armenia is still necessary, to increase the potential for the population's national self-determination. As in any other part of the diaspora, so too in the Soviet diaspora, Armenians are subject to assimilation.

(2) There exist approximately two million persons of Armenian origin within the non-Soviet diaspora. These persons vary socially and culturally according to the country or region in which they live. Within each country, region or community there are many differences among elements of Armenian origin. The range of subjective orientations includes completely assimilated persons (i.e., non-Armenians of Armenian origin), persons

effectively integrated into local societies, but retaining some attachment to Armenian culture\* (assimilated Armenians\*—the vast majority of diasporan elements), and persons who are still more attached to Armenian culture and the idea of an Armenian homeland than to any others (referred to elsewhere as "Armenians of the diaspora").

Class positions of diasporan Armenians range from bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and "professional" to working class and lumpenproletarian. A notably high proportion of diasporan Armenians are members of the petty bourgeoisies of their "host" countries. In all cases, these class divisions fall within the context of each local economic system. No substantial inter-Armenian or pan-Armenian class relationships exist.

The pace of assimilation depends on social, cultural, economic and political factors present in each locality. Thus, throughout the diaspora in the capitalist "West" there exist socio-cultural contradictions which affect those who are not yet fully assimilated into their local societies. In many cases, economic and political contradictions intensify the socio-cultural contradictions.

(3) Approximately 80,000 persons of Armenian origin live in Turkey. These people are targets of various forms of repression aimed at forcibly "Turkifying" them, and many are also subject to class exploitation. Thus, the Turkish regime and ruling class are in full contradiction with the subjective and objective interests of most Armenians in Turkey.

### **Necessary Conditions for the Solution to the National and Economic Contradictions of the Armenian People**

As the above synopsis shows, any solutions to the existing national and economic contradictions confronting the Armenian people must be multifaceted. The national self-determination being pursued by people in Soviet Armenia must be expanded to that part of the Armenian people currently outside of the Soviet Socialist Republic. In the long run, social, economic and political conflicts which these people face will only be addressed by securing the right to national self-determination within a socialist system. In addition, for the full development of the Armenian nation all Armenians must be allowed to integrate themselves into the life of their homeland as a single interacting and interdependent national entity.

#### **(A) The Armenian People within the U.S.S.R. but outside the Armenian S.S.R.**

(1) *Armenians in Akhalkalak, Karabagh and Nakhichevan:* The Armenian people of these three regions live within the historic Armenian homeland. Those in Akhalkalak and Karabagh make up the largest national entities in



these regions. These Armenian populations and geographic regions are thus in every way ready to be integrated into the Armenian S.S.R.

At present, only a small minority of Nakhichevan's population is Armenian; nevertheless, this region is historically Armenian. Prior to the invasion of the Caucasus by the Turkish army, and even after the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Republic was put under the administrative jurisdiction of Baku, there was an Armenian majority there. Nakhichevan has been emptied of its Armenian majority solely because of the discriminatory chauvinist policies of the Azerbaijani administration of the region. Furthermore, surrounded as it is by the Armenian S.S.R. on all sides except its border with Iran and Turkey, Nakhichevan is geographically linked to the economy of Soviet Armenia. Local demographic criteria alone are not grounds for continuing to exclude Nakhichevan from the Armenian S.S.R. since, even with the inclusion of Nakhichevan as part of Soviet Armenia, the republic as a whole would still contain an overwhelming Armenian majority.

Through a union of Akhalkalak, Karabagh and Nakhichevan with the Armenian S.S.R., Armenian inhabitants of these three regions will be able to contribute directly to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the Armenian S.S.R. and the mainstream of Armenian life.

(2) *Armenian Elements of the Soviet Diaspora:* All Armenian elements of the Soviet diaspora who wish to live in the Armenian S.S.R. should be encouraged to relocate to the Armenian S.S.R. if they wish to avoid assimilation, and they should be given all practical assistance to do so. Attaining these rights, however, should not prejudice their right to immigrate to all other regions of our homeland.

#### (B) The Armenian People in the Non-Soviet Diaspora

The vast majority of Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora (as well as many in the Soviet diaspora, and even in Soviet Armenia) are descendants of Armenians who were forced out of parts of their homeland now within Turkey. Often, those among them who are still attached to their homeland and wish to relocate there are most attached to that part of the Armenian homeland which is currently within the borders of Turkey. These diasporan Armenians must attain the right to relocate to such regions, and to enjoy national self-determination there. Only by returning to their homeland will they and their descendants be able to avert assimilation in the diaspora and live within an Armenian national and cultural context. Furthermore, in order that they become an integral part of their national life and not remain isolated from the mainstream of Armenian cultural life in Soviet Armenia, they should enjoy a special relationship with Soviet Armenia. (And for the

same reason, if conditions permit, the regions to which they relocate should be reintegrated into Soviet Armenia.<sup>25</sup>) In regions of the historic Armenian homeland remaining outside of Soviet Armenia, all practical steps must be taken by the future state authority over these regions to facilitate the relocation of diasporan Armenians who wish to live there. All necessary infrastructures (housing, schools, health facilities, factories, transportation and communication routes, etc.), as well as the financial and moral support necessary to make immigration possible, must be provided by the new state authorities over those areas of the Armenian homeland outside the jurisdiction of Soviet Armenia. Moreover, a socialist system must be established, to secure the social, cultural, economic and political security of all inhabitants of the region, including the Armenians.

#### (C) The Armenian People in Turkey

Those Armenians who remain in Turkey are also diasporan Armenians, for the most part. Accordingly, they too must be allowed to exercise their right to national self-determination. Whether they relocate to Soviet Armenia or to regions of the Armenian homeland currently within Turkey, they must be guaranteed the right to integrate themselves into the national life of the whole Armenian nation. As in the case of other diasporan Armenians, the policy for integrating Armenians in Turkey into the life of the Armenian homeland should leave open the possibility of integrating regions of the Armenian homeland currently in Turkey into the Armenian S.S.R.

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Since the Armenian people live in a variety of social, cultural, economic and political contexts, the process of attaining national self-determination will inevitably assume a different character in different parts of the historic Armenian homeland. Thus, instead of proposing one single solution to the national problems of the Armenian people, a number of separate but converging and mutually reinforcing processes should be pursued.

Every progressive movement in the diaspora should recognize the complexity of our situation. Accordingly, each local movement should explicitly define its own long-term objectives and responsibilities vis-a-vis each section of our people (those in Soviet Armenia, those in the Soviet diaspora, those in the non-Soviet diaspora, those in Turkey, etc.) and each region of our homeland.

#### Our Tasks in Relation to Armenians in the U.S.S.R.

(1) Although the conditions exist to justify integrating Akhalkalak, Karabagh and Nakhichevan into the Armenian S.S.R., this task should be pursued in



consultation with the inhabitants of these regions, by negotiating an agreement between the Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics. The founding principles of Soviet nationalities policy *in theory* favor a re-examination of the political affiliation of these regions; however, in practice we have seen that the present constitution of the U.S.S.R. does not provide a sufficient mechanism through which to resolve these issues. It is the responsibility of a diasporan movement which fights for self-determination in the areas now in Turkey to support the popular initiatives of our compatriots in the U.S.S.R.

(2) We recognize the need to encourage and facilitate the relocation to the Armenian homeland of all members of the Soviet diaspora who wish to live there. A non-Soviet diasporan movement should support the constructive initiatives of Armenian Soviet citizens.

It should be recognized, however, that all Armenians in the Soviet Union—whether they have relocated from the diaspora or not—reserve the right to relocate to those parts of the Armenian homeland which are currently within Turkey. It is the responsibility of our compatriots in the Soviet Union to secure this recognition from their government. The task of our patriotic liberation force in the non-Soviet diaspora is to fight to win self-determination for Armenians in parts of our homeland currently under Ankara's control. To do this, we must mobilize the non-Soviet diaspora and Armenians in Turkey, in order to build the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle. As the struggle develops, possibilities may open up for diasporan Armenians in the Soviet Union to participate directly or indirectly in our movement. This, of course, will depend on the decisions and policies implemented within in the U.S.S.R. In the meantime, our own duties should be focused on the non-Soviet diaspora.

(3) Although it is only a fraction of our historic homeland, the Armenian S.S.R. is the modern homeland of the Armenian people. As an integral part of the U.S.S.R., the Armenian S.S.R. has both profited and suffered at different times and in different domains. If correct socialist policies had been consistently applied over the past seventy years, much, much more progress could have been made. Even with its very long list of faults, however, the fact remains that significant progress has been made in the republic. Today, the Armenian S.S.R. and its people represent the center and basis of Armenian cultural and community life throughout the world.

For this reason, Soviet Armenia's direct or indirect support for our patriotic liberation struggle may be decisive for the final outcome of the struggle. For one thing, no future territorial reunification of any sort will be possible without the consent of the Armenian S.S.R. Even if regions of the

Armenian homeland now in Turkey were to be liberated by diasporan Armenians without the slightest participation of Soviet Armenia, their inclusion into the Armenian S.S.R. will ultimately be determined by decisions of the Armenian S.S.R.

In addition, direct or indirect assistance from the Armenian S.S.R. and its people could greatly assist diasporan Armenians in their struggle for national self-determination. Furthermore, the closer the communication between the diasporan movement and the Armenian S.S.R., the greater will be the possibility of a highly developed special relationship which could in turn increase possibilities for diasporan relocation to "Western Armenia."

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In summary, the following points should be recognized:

- (1) The Armenian S.S.R. constitutes the modern Armenian state where the Armenian people enjoy self-determination;
- (2) The Armenian S.S.R. is at present an integral part of the U.S.S.R. (although the interrelationships among the republics is rapidly changing);
- (3) The Armenian S.S.R.'s social, cultural and economic accomplishments constitute the backbone of Armenian cultural life worldwide;
- (4) Possible future initiatives by the Armenian S.S.R. could be decisive in the outcome of the patriotic liberation struggle, and will determine whether or not Armenian regions now within Turkey will ever be included within the political and administrative borders of the Armenian S.S.R.

Our movement will work independently of the Armenian S.S.R. to achieve Armenian self-determination in regions of our homeland now in Turkey. At the same time, it will pursue policies which facilitate possible Soviet Armenian initiatives in the future.

### Our Goal

We realize the following: (a) Assimilation is inevitable in the diaspora; (b) Many people in the diaspora still wish to retain their Armenian culture and live within an Armenian national context; (c) Social and cultural differences between diasporan Armenians and the dominant peoples of diasporan countries result in daily conflicts for diasporan Armenians; (d) In addition to providing a solution to the subjective conflicts of life in the diaspora, relocation to a socialist Armenian homeland would also solve objective conflicts to which significant numbers of diasporan Armenians are subjected; (e) All diasporan Armenians must attain the right to relocate to the Armenian homeland from whence their ancestors and families were forcibly expelled; (f) The establishment of a socialist system throughout parts of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey would bring an end to the present



colonial occupation of these areas, would halt the oppression of non-Turkish peoples there, would halt the worst abuses of capitalist exploitation of workers and small farmers there and would put an end to the provocative NATO military presence on the Soviet border (a presence that includes forwardly deployed delivery systems capable of nuclear first strike).

Keeping these points in mind, and in view of what has already been said, our goal of national self-determination and a united Armenian national entity may be elaborated as follows:

—Voluntary relocation of all diasporan Armenians wishing to live in their homeland to those parts of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey;

—National self-determination of the Armenian people, in a form to be determined by the presence of our people in the region, by the aspirations of all other populations in the region, and possibly by an initiative on the part of the Armenian S.S.R. and its people (of course, this same right to a form of national self-determination should be extended to all other peoples native to the region, too);

—The establishment of a socialist system throughout parts of the Armenian homeland liberated from domination by the current Turkish state;

—A special relationship between diasporan Armenians and Armenians born in Turkey who relocate to parts of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey on the one hand, and Soviet Armenia, on the other;

—If possible, incorporation of areas of the Armenian homeland where relocated Armenians make up at least a relative majority (or where the consensus of the overall population permits), into the Armenian S.S.R.;

—In regions not incorporated into the Armenian S.S.R., the establishment of a socialist system which guarantees the economic, social, democratic and political rights of all citizens.

To achieve these goals we consider it indispensable to mobilize all human and material resources available around the most committed patriots. It is equally important that the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle be integrated into the general struggle of democratic and socialist forces against the present-day Turkish state. This last task will require recruiting large numbers of Armenians and non-Armenians (all native peoples of the Armenian homeland\* currently in Turkey) into our movement as full and equal members. In addition, practical aid must be secured for the relocation of diasporan Armenians. And finally, without expecting future assistance from the Armenian S.S.R., steps should be taken to maximize the possibility for such assistance. Until we achieve our goal, every effort should be made to defend the rights of our people in their diasporan communities.

*During his imprisonment in France, Melkonian carried on correspondence with several comrades on the subject of national self-determination. The following letter to a correspondent in the United States was dated June 11, 1987.*

## A LETTER ON SELF-DETERMINATION

Dear Comrade,

We are still making too many generalizations, using ill-defined words, and just not going to the trouble of learning the facts in detail and situating our analyses within a wide perspective. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to study our truly complex situation in detail. For the past few years I have done my best to study many important subjects—Soviet Armenia, Armenians in the U.S.S.R., non-Soviet diasporan communities, the Kurdish people, Turkey, the region in general, the U.S.S.R. in general, and soon. Although I still lack a lot of necessary information, what I have learned has convinced me that in many respects our approach to these issues in the past has left much to be desired. Well, let me get down to specific questions you posed in your last letter.

First of all, you brought up the question of assimilation. You made the point that you opposed coercive assimilation, but that you considered voluntary assimilation to be “neither here nor there.” Of course coercive assimilation is to be opposed, but coercion can take forms more subtle than prosecution by Turkish courts, Phalangist harassment or the imposition of Islamic law in Iran. Let us ignore this issue for the moment, however, and turn our attention to the relationship between assimilation and the Armenian national question.

Let me begin by stating the obvious: being Armenian is not bad. It is not a fault, a quirk or a “count against” anyone. Without going into the subjective character of value assessments in comparing cultures, it is safe to say that Armenian culture is “good”; it is just as good as any other culture, and it is very normal that persons of Armenian origin prefer to live within an Armenian cultural context. So no one should automatically be expected to accept assimilation, even though we know that in the long run assimilation is inevitable in the diaspora.

Since assimilation is inevitable in the diaspora, it is understandable that those who would prefer to live within an Armenian national-cultural context should wish to live in the Armenian homeland. Now, it is just plain historical fact that Soviet Armenia does not constitute the whole Armenian homeland. Indeed, the vast majority of diasporan Armenians trace their origins to those regions now in Turkey, as do at least half of the Armenians in Soviet



Armenia. Recognizing this, a diasporan Armenian (and for that matter an Armenian in Soviet Armenia) should have as much right to live in the part of their homeland currently controlled by Ankara as in present-day Soviet Armenia itself. So we are not simply faced with two alternatives—either the diaspora or Soviet Armenia (within its present geographical limits).

Before continuing too much further in this direction, however, let us return to the subject of assimilation. To avoid assimilation one must live within the geographical and historical context of the Armenian people's developing collective culture. In other words, one must live within the Armenian homeland. All Armenians—including Armenians from Soviet Armenia—certainly have the right (not the obligation, of course, but the right) to live in those regions of their homeland currently within the borders of the Republic of Turkey. This is a good solution to assimilation, and it is even a perfectly acceptable goal for Armenians in Soviet Armenia, who are not threatened by assimilation.<sup>26</sup> Thus it is up to anyone strongly attached to our culture to take the necessary steps to gain this right in practice. It may be true that such highly committed people make up a small proportion of the diaspora population. Nevertheless, they do exist and no one has the right to impose the passivity of the majority on them. The most direct way for our committed compatriots to work to attain the right to live in "Western Armenia" is by participating in the revolutionary struggle in Turkey.

Elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> I have discussed the crucial question of how such participation can be developed, and I will not repeat myself here. The question I would like to address here is: Exactly what conditions must be met to allow the Armenian people—or those among them who so wish—to live in the western portion of their homeland and develop freely within an Armenian national-cultural context? I will limit myself to responding to your remarks, rather than taking the question head-on and repeating everything I said in my article on assimilation.<sup>28</sup>

In "The Orientation of Our Goal,"<sup>29</sup> I did not formally define the term "self-determination," and this seems to have left the door open to some misinterpretations. For example, you state that a necessary precondition for the exercise of self-determination is "the ability of a nation to opt for independent statehood, if that people chooses to do so."

Actually, your conception of self-determination might be better described as a statement of *certain maximum limits* to self-determination. I do not believe that this is a correct conception of self-determination—at least not in Marxist circles. Although I do not have the quotation at hand here in my cell, I know that Lenin defined self-determination in a manner similar to the following: the right of a nation to freely determine its own future, including independent statehood if or when the situation permits. (I am sure you are acquainted with Lenin's article, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determina-

tion." You might compare it with the views of Stepan Shahumian and Mao.)

The point I want to make is that, according to Lenin, self-determination does not require that a people be able to manage an independent state on its own. Peoples and nations which are incapable of existing as independent states can nevertheless exercise self-determination. To deny this is to deny that a great part of the population of the U.S.S.R. is capable of exercising self-determination, because much of the population of the U.S.S.R. consists of various nationalities and other minority peoples who are not at all in a position to make it on their own as independent states. Political, economic and other realities make their political independence impossible; nevertheless, in my opinion, those nationalities and peoples should be able to exercise a high degree of self-determination. I cannot think of one people in the Soviet Union which would benefit from independent statehood in the long run. In fact, if independent, some of these peoples would very likely lose much of their ability to exercise their own will because they would lose many of the economic, social, political and military advantages which facilitate cultural and social development. So in many cases independence may be possible but not desirable. Or it may be neither possible nor desirable, in which case the nation in question will (hopefully) refuse it. The latter is the case of the Armenians. Recognizing this, one should not categorically link national self-determination with the ability to form an independent state.

I hope this helps clear up your questions about the meaning of the term "self-determination." I should also remind you that in "The Orientation of Our Goal" I usually used the term "a form of self-determination,"<sup>30</sup> in order to emphasize the point that the notion of independence was not to be forcibly shoved into our discussion. In fact, if you review that text you will see that I am completely opposed to the exclusion of Armenia from a multinational union of nations in which democratic and socialist principles concerning the rights of each member are in effect.

I agree with your observation that most Soviet Armenians have not agitated for independent statehood simply because they are disinclined to render themselves vulnerable to invasion.<sup>31</sup> However, I would like to propose what I consider to be a more correct approach to the issue of Armenian republican membership in the U.S.S.R. First of all, we should not emphasize military factors. Instead, we should look at the question from a position of principle (and I want to emphasize that one of our principles is realism). *In principle*, a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—a cooperative, international union of socialist republics governed by a democratic system of popular councils—is a very desirable form of state power. And it is even more desirable in our case, since Soviet Armenia has neither the natural resources nor the geographical features which would make it a viable candidate for independence. Only within the framework of the Soviet Union



can the economic needs of the people in our homeland be met. So even if there were no military threat to our homeland, its people would still have a hard time existing as an independent state.

At the same time, it is obvious that the original principles of the U.S.S.R. have not been respected. So for the good of all the peoples of the U.S.S.R., the framework of the U.S.S.R.—its constitution, the relations among constituent republics and peoples, economic mechanisms and political processes—needs to be reassessed and fundamentally recast.

Your next paragraph was where I most disagreed with you. Let me quote you *in extenso*:

But to extend self-determination to diasporan Armenians, wouldn't it be more direct and time efficient to encourage and facilitate immigration from the diaspora to Soviet Armenia, rather than trying to effect some kind of a mass return to Western Armenia? To me, the objection that most diasporan Armenians are somehow "attached" to Western Armenia is not necessarily an objection; it might just be an indication that the task of progressive Armenians is to *change* such a mentality. And it certainly seems as though it would be easier to attempt to change that mentality than to accept it and try to set the stage for self-determination of Armenians in Western Armenia.

I have so much to say here that it is hard to figure out where to start. First of all, you wrote that immigration to Soviet Armenia is "more direct" and "time-efficient." Here you have really missed an important point: When dealing with the Armenian people, you must realize you are dealing with people who have a national and cultural identity with a very real historical and geographic basis. Because of Soviet Armenia's geographical limitations it is not possible for its people to secure Armenian national and cultural life in all its variant forms. "Western Armenia" is the natural ground for the continuation of the form of Armenian culture that developed within that geographic space. In fact, even in Soviet Armenia today, the cultural consequences of the lack of historical continuity with other parts of the Armenian nation is strongly felt. Precisely because of this fact, the people most concerned about the part of our homeland now in Turkey are residents of Soviet Armenia. This is a fact to be digested. Attachment to "Western Armenia" is pervasive on a popular level (on a typical occasion, for example, when grammar school students were asked to write an essay on absolutely anything important to them, eighty percent of them wrote about Ararat); but this attachment is also very much present within the Communist Party of the

Armenian S.S.R. Consider, for example, these facts: Influential figures, from John Kirakosian to Silva Kaputikian have made strong statements on the subject; Soviet Armenian poets, novelists and filmmakers continue to develop themes attached to the other side of the border; and The flag and official seal of Soviet Armenia—the latter prominently featuring a representation of Mt. Ararat—invoke this attachment.<sup>32</sup>

The reason I have gone on a bit of a tangent here is, first, to suggest that attachment to the regions in Turkey is not limited to a small minority of motivated diasporan elements, but rather is felt by all patriotic Armenians everywhere. Also, I wanted to make the point that the attachment is felt in Soviet Armenia more than anywhere else. I conclude from all of this that immigration to Soviet Armenia should not be interpreted as reducing the subjective attachment of Armenians to the portion of their homeland currently within the borders of Turkey. Anyone acquainted with the whole of Armenian culture will understand the widespread attachment of Armenians to regions now in Turkey, since those regions have for centuries been the stage upon which most of our descendants and their culture developed. Indeed, to identify oneself as an Armenian is to adopt a cultural orientation which is largely tied to those regions now in Turkey.

I am not one to harp on the genocide; nevertheless, we must recognize that what took place between 1915 and 1918 has had an enormous effect on Armenian national-cultural life today. As a result of the genocide, it is now impossible to completely reconstruct the Armenian cultural life of the past. This, however, does not mean that we should give up trying to re-establish the collective life of our people on that land. Subjective factors here are important. You do not solve national problems by herding people here and there just because it is "more direct," "time-efficient" or "easier." This is a Young Turk, Nazi or Zionist "solution." After all, it was supposedly easier to send Jews to Palestine, even though they had nothing at all to do with that land, rather than resettling them in their home countries. This "solution," however, was by no means just. Our task is not at all to find such an "easy solution." Our task, rather, is to seek a *just* solution—a solution conducive to the equality of nations, self-determination and the global victory of socialism.

Instead of opting for ease and time-efficiency when it comes to the Armenian case, one should look the true problem squarely in the face. The Armenian people have been denied the right to live in any part of their homeland they choose. A mentality of attachment to that portion of their homeland from which they have been excluded is entirely justifiable and laudable, from the perspective of internationalism and socialism. On the other hand, the mentality of funneling all Armenians into Soviet Armenia, of regarding one side of the Arax river as being primarily for the Armenians



and the other side as being for non-Armenians, of regarding present-day Soviet Armenia as the preferred homeland for all Armenians, etc.—this is a mentality with chauvinist and racist overtones. It is a mentality which overlooks the historical and cultural realities of the Armenian people and accepts a territorial status quo produced by genocide and Turkish nationalist-chauvinist aggression, and maintained by the Turkish army and NATO. *This is the mentality which socialists and internationalists must fight.*

Before continuing in this vein, however, I would like to make a few more points about what I consider to be flaws in your methodology. First of all, in order to carry out a serious analysis we must study the situation in detail, collect relevant facts and never try to take shortcuts just because we do not have the necessary information on hand. Any analysis, any statement made without sufficient information can impede the necessary theoretical development of our struggle. Of course, we all commit this error from time to time, usually without realizing it. Nevertheless, we must be conscious of the dangers and work to minimize errors.

For example, referring to demographic data on eastern Anatolia, you wrote that “available data is scanty.” This statement is false. Not only is there up-to-date, accurate and easily obtainable information available in several languages, but this information is rather detailed. The fact is, with minimal time and energy, you can find out just about anything you want concerning the demographics of regions within the borders of the Turkish state (refer, for example, to *The Statesman's Yearbook*). And that information indicates that within the area of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey, there is a total population of between 3,600,000 and 4,000,000, depending on the exact frontiers you choose. If we take the 3,600,000 figure for a moment, we will see that this population is divided approximately as follows: 2,200,000 Kurds; 1,300,000 Turks\*; and 100,000 members of other minorities, including a handful of Armenians.

What are we to make of this? Let me quote you again: “Every indication is that Armenians do not constitute a national formation or a demographic plurality on any significant portion of Western Armenia.” I realize that you were writing informally (as I am now), and that you were probably pressed for time. It should be pointed out, however, that there are a few careless mistakes here which may lead to further errors or misleading implications.

First of all, your use of the present tense makes your statement a “the sky is blue” type of statement. Such a clear, honest statement is generally good; unfortunately, you have put this factual statement into a context which can make it misleading. Even someone only slightly acquainted with the area and its modern history should be aware that, except for a very small residue, there are no Armenians left in that area. In view of this fact, it is probable (and indeed almost inevitable) that Armenians will not constitute even a plurality

in the region as a whole (in the absence, that is, of any initiative from Soviet Armenia) even if a diasporan Armenian revolutionary vanguard were to succeed in gaining our people's practical right to resettle in those regions. Depending on the course of future events, however, it is possible that Armenians may come to constitute at least a plurality of the population on a portion of that territory.

For this reason I have argued that as a diasporan force we should set ourselves a minimum goal while not overlooking the fact that this goal may possibly be surpassed. *This minimum goal is a form of self-determination as a national minority within a revolutionary Turkish or Kurdish state.* It should be clear here that I am not talking about an unrealistic (and therefore unprincipled) goal—and least of all, an independent Armenian state.

Further on you missed another point, comrade. You write that “One implication of the fact that few Armenians currently inhabit Western Armenia is that almost by definition Armenians would therefore be incapable of exercising a ‘right’ to self-determination.”

For one thing, this claim is not sufficiently qualified. If we limit our consideration solely to non-Soviet diasporan Armenians, then the statement might be more accurate (although it still would not be true, since as I explained above, self-determination does not necessarily entail the ability of a people to opt for state independence). But let us pause for a moment to look at the situation from a different angle. Turning to the general term “Armenians” in your statement, let's take a couple of steps back, to regard the demographic facts in the entire Armenian homeland, on both sides of the current Soviet-Turkish border.

There are slightly over six million persons of Armenian origin in the world. And since there are about two million such persons in the non-Soviet diaspora, we may conclude that the majority of Armenians live within the U.S.S.R. In view of this, is it true that Armenians can never constitute at least a plurality in these regions in Turkey? Below you have the demographic facts for Armenians in the U.S.S.R.<sup>33</sup> By collating this information, we can gain a better idea of exactly where we stand:

Armenians in Soviet Armenia .....	approx. 3,050,000
Non-Armenians in Soviet Armenia .....	approx. 400,000
Armenians in Karabagh,	
Nakhichevan and Akhalkalak .....	approx. 300,000
Non-Armenians in the above regions .....	approx. 300,000
Persons of Armenian origin	
in the Soviet diaspora .....	approx. 1,000,000



Now, just for the sake of illustration, let us for a moment crank up our imaginations and dream the unlikely: let us say that tomorrow morning the Red Army were by some miracle to roll into all regions of our historic homeland and establish new frontiers for the Soviet Republic. In our little scenario, the Armenian people would already constitute a plurality in the republic—3,050,000 Armenians, as opposed to 2,250,000 Kurds, and 1,700,000 Turks and others. This is all in the realm of fanciful speculation, of course. Nevertheless, my point remains: The population of Soviet Armenia alone could conceivably justify territorial annexation by the U.S.S.R. of all regions of our historic homeland now in Turkey.

Having said this, however, a word of caution: We diasporan Armenians should entertain no illusions. We should not pin our hopes on Soviet Armenia or any other force not under our direct control. Our challenge is to figure out how to organize our own potential to solve our own problems. At the same time we should not be self-absorbed. No force in the diaspora may justifiably lay claim to representing the Armenian people as a whole, or pretend to be the overriding force in the future of the Armenian people. To do so would be to mislead our people and ourselves.

The fact is that progressive Armenians in the non-Soviet diaspora represent a very minor force compared to our compatriots in the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia in particular. We have no right to make sweeping statements that preclude decisions and actions on the part of our compatriots in Soviet Armenia, especially when it comes to problems that concern them perhaps more than they do us. Admittedly, Soviet Armenia and the U.S.S.R. are not likely to take any initiatives on this issue; nevertheless, if they ever should choose to move (whether with the Red Army or by subtler means), we must admit that their actions would be historically and demographically justified.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, there is the other side of the coin, too: the same regions of the Armenian homeland—or at least part of them—could be included within a revolutionary Turkish and/or Kurdish state. In these contexts, the Turkish or Kurdish peoples would constitute definite majorities. But even then such an eventuality would not negate the right of Soviet Armenia and the Armenian people to exert their influence in the area. It is not unlikely that the future of the area will be largely influenced by joint efforts by Turkish and Kurdish progressive forces—hopefully with the participation of a diasporan Armenian vanguard force. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that Soviet Armenia could also step in to determine the future of the region.

After reading all of this you may be saying to yourself “Man, this guy has really gone out on a limb. He is exceedingly optimistic.” Believe me, I am not. My explanations here are haphazard and lack a lot of necessary details. I am currently trying to study these subjects in more detail. But from my other letters you should know very well that I consider the immediate goal of a

diasporan force to be much more modest—the minimum goal. As I have already pointed out, realism should be one of our main guiding principles. Being realistic involves distinguishing the possible from the impossible, and the probable from the improbable, but doing this without confusing the improbable with the impossible. So in determining what tasks we should undertake, we should not ignore other realities which may someday override our efforts.

From what I have said so far, I want to emphasize the following very general points: Our people have every right to struggle to live in any part of our homeland they wish. Our task, then, is to exercise this right. Although the possibility of an independent Armenian state can be eliminated from the outset, Armenian national self-determination on the non-Soviet portion of the Armenian homeland could be achieved in a variety of ways short of national statehood. Beyond these few observations, we should just admit that the future of the region is an open question.

There is another point to be made, in order to avoid falling into an unconscious sort of exclusivism, chauvinism or reactionary nationalism. Up until now we have discussed demography as if national identities necessarily represented political preferences. True, we can pretty much assume that national identity will play a very important role in determining what kind of state the population on the land will want to be a part of. Nevertheless, it is wrong to assume offhand that all Kurds will automatically prefer a Kurdistan, or that all Turks will automatically prefer a Turkey and all Armenians will automatically prefer an Armenia. There are many indications that such assumptions may not be all that valid, especially within politicized circles. It is not correct, for example, to assume that only Armenians will ever want to live in an Armenia (in this case, an expanded Soviet Armenia). If we ignore subjective factors for a moment and take a serious look at the present economic situation in the region, we will quickly understand that the non-Armenian populations of the area will have a lot to gain by opting for inclusion in the U.S.S.R. In fact, many of them understand this already. There is a Cherkez progressive movement, for example (a movement which also includes Lazes and Hemshinis), which already considers unification with the Abkhazia Autonomous Republic in Soviet Georgia to be its goal. Without going into details, I might also mention that for various reasons some Turkish and Kurdish organizations (though they may still try to avoid addressing territorial questions), are very interested in the possibility of a greater Soviet role in the region, and look to Soviet Armenia as a possible key player in this regard.

There is much more that could be said on this topic, but I will limit myself to this basic point: demographic considerations do not and should not entirely determine the future of a region. One must also consider the aspirations of the peoples in question, and these aspirations may or may not



conform to national distinctions. In the future, we should keep this in mind when addressing organizational problems.

At this point, I would like to make an interjection which I hope does not sound too much like quibbling. I have noticed that you and others use the term "Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia," when referring to Soviet Armenia. Perhaps you do this to avoid what you may consider to be exclusivist implication of the word "Armenian," in the title "Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic." I am guessing that in this context you take "Armenian" to mean "of or pertaining (exclusively) to the Armenian people." Such a translation, however, is not strictly correct, nor is it the official translation of the word *Haigagan*. As you know, declensions in the Armenian language allow one to form a number of adjectives from one root word. Each adjective thus formed has its own nuances, which are often lost when translated into English. The correct and official translation of the name of Soviet Armenia is "The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic." Here *Haigagan* means "of or pertaining to Armenia and/or the Armenian people." In reality, this is a very precise, correct title. It has the internationalist implication you are careful to try to bring into the English by saying "Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia." And this, I think, is exactly why Soviet translators (who in such cases are very careful about meaning) have rendered the official name as they have. This may sound like nit-picking, but you should understand the linguistic facts and their implications.

At another point in your letter you observe that many Armenians from the Middle East have voted with their feet to emigrate to the U.S. instead of Soviet Armenia. You write: "I have the strong suspicion that most of the Armenians who emigrated to the U.S. over the past two decades could just as easily have applied for and received visas for Soviet Armenia if they chose to do so." This, you claim, illustrates the fact that many diasporan Armenians are not really very attached to their ancestral lands.

This letter is already too bulky, and I have attempted to address the issue of relocation to and from the Armenian S.S.R. elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> But let me make one quick remark here: It is evidently true that in practice many Armenians (perhaps even a large majority of them) in the non-Soviet diaspora are much less tied to our homeland than they would admit. However, you have chosen an inaccurate example to illustrate your point, because of the fact that Soviet immigration visas have been more difficult to obtain than U.S., French, Canadian, Australian or Brazilian visas. This is unfortunate. Immigration officials in Soviet Armenia admit people mostly on the basis of how they think new arrivals will serve or hinder the development of the republic. So while your general thesis is well-taken, your illustration is not as convincing as it could have been.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that not all such emigrants are "love-sick mail-order brides pining away for *Amereekah*," as you put it. There are plenty of good, sincere patriots who have emigrated from the "Middle East" to western Europe and the U.S.

Toward the end of your letter you refer to my position that Armenians should secure for themselves the right to return from diaspora to "Western Armenia" by participating in the struggle which shall overthrow the present Turkish state. You write: "This is a just goal, a goal which demands the support of all true patriots, as well as internationalists everywhere. So why not state this as the goal, rather than mixing in the issue of national self-determination?"

I hope this letter has addressed your question. The only thing I have got to add is that Armenian participation in the struggle in Turkey is a very serious matter which involves many responsibilities and obligations. It is not just a matter of internationalist expression or Armenian patriotism. *Rather it is the only worthwhile thing for diasporan Armenians to do if they are serious about one day living in that part of our homeland currently within the borders of Turkey.* Our success or failure will depend upon our own work, as well as some factors which we can influence but cannot control—factors such as future Soviet foreign policy, regional developments and the internal situation in Turkey. Nevertheless, we must pursue this goal because it is the only just and achievable option open to Armenian patriots. And we know for sure that all the genteel folks belly-aching about "genocide, genocide, genocide . . . U.N., U.N., U.N. . . Congress, Congress, Congress. . ." have achieved nothing but seventy-two years of failure.

Please excuse me both for the length of this letter and the brevity of my explanations. It is frustrating to have to discuss these issues on paper, rather than speaking face-to-face with you and other comrades.

Warmest regards,  
Monte



*The following discussion was excerpted from a letter dated February 16, 1988, and posted from Poissy Prison. The distinction between self-determination and national statehood—an issue which has always been pivotal for Armenians—took on even greater importance with the emergence in February 1988 of the mass movement in solidarity with Artsakh (Karabagh), a movement which contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union in August of 1991 and the emergence of the formally independent Republic of Armenia.*

*Several passages in this article were omitted from the first edition of The Right to Struggle without Monte's prior approval. Most of the omissions were references to Lenin. In his June 1990 instructions to the editor, Monte requested that these passages be reinserted in the second edition. As this and other evidence confirm, Monte's admiration of Lenin was undiminished, even at the height of the campaign to vilify the Russian revolutionary in Armenia and throughout the ex-"socialist" countries.*

### NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE ARMENIAN CASE TODAY

Dear Comrade,

Last week I received a pile of mail that prison censors had blocked from September to November of last year. In this pile was your letter of October 7. Thank you for the photocopies of Lenin's essays on national self-determination.

I would like to add a few words of clarification to my June 11 letter<sup>36</sup> and the essay "The Orientation of Our Goal."<sup>37</sup> In these and other writings I have attempted to explain why our patriotic liberation struggle is a struggle for Armenian national self-determination in those parts of our homeland currently within the borders of the Turkish state. Collating those texts, I think this point was made with sufficient clarity. Nevertheless, you still suspect that my use of the term "self-determination" differs from Lenin's use of the term. Now that I have the pertinent texts in front of me, I think I can convince you that my use of the term strictly conforms to Lenin's conception and to Marxist theory. At the same time, I hope to put to rest any remaining doubts that our struggle is for national self-determination.

First of all, it seems that certain misunderstandings concerning "self-determination" have their source in a decontextualized and uncritical reading of the following passage from Lenin's *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*: "It means that 'self-determination of nations' in the Marxists' Programme *cannot, from a historico-economic point of view, have any*

other meaning than political self-determination, state independence and the formation of a nation state."<sup>38</sup>

If, as Marxists, we are to make sense of this passage, we must first identify the subject of the sentence. Until we understand what "It" refers to, we shall not be able to grasp the meaning of the passage as a whole. Let me quote the whole paragraph:

Therefore, Rosa Luxemburg notwithstanding, the example of the whole of progressive and civilized mankind, the example of the Balkans and that of Asia prove that Kautsky's proposition is absolutely correct: the national state is the rule and the "norm" of capitalism; the multinational state represents backwardness, or is an exception. From the standpoint of national relations, the best conditions for the development of capitalism are undoubtedly provided by the national state. This does not mean, of course, that such a state, which is based on bourgeois relations, can eliminate the exploitation and oppression of nations. It only means that Marxists cannot lose sight of the powerful *economic* factors that give rise to the urge to create national states. "It" means that "self-determination of nations" in the Marxists' Programme *cannot, from a historico-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state.*

The attentive reader will easily see that the subject "It" of the last sentence refers to the sentence I have underlined in the citation directly above. Clearly, what Lenin was saying was that, "from the standpoint of national relations" and *in the context of capitalist development*, national self-determination can only be understood as "political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state."

This is corroborated in the opening statements of Lenin's article. There, he makes an appeal for a "historico-economic study of the national movements." He warns us about "generalities about self-determination," then he goes on to explain the economic foundation of national movements in a period of capitalist development. He concludes that under such conditions:

... the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of *national states*, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most



profound economic factors drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is *typical* and normal for the capitalist period.

Consequently, if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it is absolutely clear that Lenin was concerned here with national self-determination in a capitalist period only. Within this *same context* he adds: "Later on [in the same article under review by Lenin] we shall see still other reasons why it would be wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything but the *right* [emphasis added by MM.—Ed.] to existence as a separate state." So, even within a capitalist context, Lenin implicitly recognized that self-determination (with intra-national class conflict, of course) is possible without political independence, as long as members of a nation democratically opt not to exercise their right to separate statehood.

To further elucidate this point, Lenin commented on Kautsky's accurate statement:

The national state is the form *most suited* to present-day conditions [i.e., capitalist, civilized, economically progressive conditions, as distinguished from medieval, pre-capitalist, etc.]; it is the form in which the state can best fulfill its tasks.<sup>40</sup>

According to Lenin, these are the tasks

...of securing the freest, widest and speediest development of capitalism. To this we must add Kautsky's still more precise concluding remark that states of mixed national composition (known as multi-national states, as distinct from nation states) are "always those whose internal constitution has for some reason or other remained abnormal or underdeveloped."<sup>41</sup>

The passages quoted above first appeared between 1914 and 1916. They predate the October Bolshevik Revolution, the foundation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the inclusion of part of our homeland in this union. These passages also predate by many years the evolution of Turkey into a full-blown capitalist state. Now, since we are currently dealing with the Armenian case in 1988, we should recognize that our nation is no longer undergoing capitalist development.<sup>42</sup> We should, therefore, speak "from the standpoint of national relations." This, after all, is why Lenin qualified his statement that self-determination cannot have any other meaning than state independence, by interjecting the phrase "from a historico-economic point of view." This is an important qualification: In 1988, the historico-economic situation of Armenians is not the same for our people as in 1914 or 1916!

Instead of limiting our discussion to these few passages, however, let us consider several additional writings by Lenin on the national question. To start with, let me quote a key statement, which follows just a few lines after the paragraph cited:

The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within *definite* [Lenin's emphasis] historical limits, and, if it refers to a particular country (e.g., the national programme for a given country), that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical epoch.<sup>43</sup>

Progressive Armenians would do well to heed Lenin's repeated appeals: We must set out to study our truly complex situation in detail, to understand the nature and requirements of our present struggle. Lenin was writing when the national question could still be discussed exclusively within the context of social formations dominated by capitalism and pre-capitalist modes of production. This should be obvious from the content of Lenin's discussion, even if one were to disregard the dates of the texts. Nevertheless, Lenin criticized Parabellum for looking backwards in his analyses, and he criticized his comrade Rosa Luxemburg for ignoring the historical particularities of Russia at the time.

From this, it is clear that, if Lenin were alive today, he would criticize *us* for failing to reorient our struggle to present historical realities. Lenin's discussions of the national question are informed by his observation that the domination of one nation by another necessarily implies that the oppressed nation's economic potential is being controlled, sapped and stunted by the oppressor nation. The examples of Ireland and India spring readily to mind.



In such cases, the oppressed nation has everything to lose and nothing to gain from continued foreign domination, since the capitalist development of the oppressed nation is being hindered. This is why in such a context it was entirely correct to insist that national self-determination implied independent statehood, and to exhort revolutionaries of oppressor nations to actively support the struggle of oppressed nations for independence.

The historico-economic context of Lenin's articles was that of the capture of home markets in politically united territories with culturally and linguistically homogeneous populations. It was the period of rapidly expanding predatory imperialism—a period marked by extremely competitive colonial rivalries. But even back then, Lenin emphasized that “independent” states were often very dependent on the finance capital of one or another foreign imperialist bourgeoisie, and that therefore the question of political self-determination should not be confused with the question of economic independence. In Lenin's time, powerful economic considerations, including the attempt of “national classes” to capture home markets, gave rise to the formation of national states. Of course, this tendency still exists in many cases—but not in all of them. Our own case is one of the exceptions.

In his articles written before 1917, Lenin referred solely to the various stages of capitalist development. He did not consider the situation within a socialist context, simply because no such thing yet existed, and the question was not yet before him. Lenin pointed out that at the time two phases of capitalism existed: the first of these was “the period of the collapse of feudalism and absolutism, the period of the formation of the bourgeois-democratic society and state, when the national movements for the first time become mass movements and in one way or another draw *all* classes of the population into politics through the press, participation in representative institutions, etc.,” and the second period was “the period of fully formed capitalist states with a long-established constitutional regime and a highly developed antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie—a period that may be called the eve of capitalism's downfall.” In today's world we still find both variations (though the first one is becoming rarer and rarer). But these two phases of capitalism exist alongside various levels of socialist development.

(Note: Let's not forget that socialism is an intermediary stage of preparation for communism. As such, it will vary from country to country and from one historic period to another. What is essential in socialist development is the suppression of economic exploitation, the control of political power by producers (primarily workers and peasants), popular democracy, economic planning, internationalist cooperation and solidarity with other socialist forces—and all of this with the ultimate aim of eventually setting the stage for a classless communist society.)

The advent of a noncapitalist system radically distinguishes our present historical context from that in which Lenin wrote the articles before us. It is now up to us to put historical materialism to work in our particular case in this particular historical period. Let us avoid the mistakes—committed by many revolutionaries, including as brilliant and courageous a Marxist as Rosa Luxemburg—of automatically equating very different situations. We must always strive to “interpret the Marxist programme in Marxist fashion, not in a childish way.”

Lenin's observation at the turn of the century has great weight today: “The attempt of the P.S.P. [the Polish Socialist Party] in 1896 to ‘establish’ for all time the point of view Marx had held in a *different epoch* was an attempt to use the *letter* of Marxism against the *spirit* of Marxism.”

Lenin was not one to use vague or misleading terms. If he intended “self-determination” to mean “independence,” he would have used the latter word instead. Viewing Lenin's writings on the national question within their proper historico-economic context, he simply held that political independence was *at that time* a precondition for self-determination. To construe this as an absolute statement that in other historical periods and in other economic systems no nation or people will ever be able to exercise self-determination without being able to create an independent state is just incorrect. For Lenin, as for ourselves, “self-determination” means exactly that: the ability of a people to determine its own present and future. Within a socialist context, nations can better determine their own present and future development through internationalist cooperation and coordination. Through such cooperation they can build stronger economies that will produce the material base upon which other social, cultural and political progress depends (not to mention military defense against imperialist aggression). It is ridiculous to compare prerequisites for national self-determination in the face of capitalist exploitation by an oppressor nation with the characteristics of national self-determination in the context of internationalist and socialist cooperation.

Even in a socialist context, of course, it should remain an essential principle that any nation should have the right to opt for independent statehood. If, despite all arguments in favor of integration into a cooperative union of nations, a particular people obstinately insists on formal state independence, then it should have the right to that independence—provided that such a decision amounts to a democratic mandate on the part of the economically productive classes. If formal state independence proves to be an obstacle in the way of the progress of the nation or a hindrance to economic development, if it cripples social development or invites imperialist aggression—in short, if formal state independence proves to block the route to a higher level of national self-determination—then the nation in question is likely to



reverse its decision to opt for independence. This follows Lenin's observation that "Marx considered the separation of an oppressed nation to be a step toward federation, and consequently, not toward a split, but toward concentration, both political and economic, but concentration on the basis of democracy." (It should be kept in mind, of course, that we are extending the idea to include nations which are not necessarily oppressed from the outset.) As Lenin points out, the boundaries of a state should not be forced on peoples who do not democratically decide to participate in them. Lenin explained that the insistence on retaining state boundaries that do not comply with national aspirations is a social-chauvinist position, not a socialist's formulation of the national question.

In this light, let us very briefly turn to the particular circumstances of the Armenian nation in the present period of history and in the economic context of all parts of the historic Armenian homeland.

The smaller portion of our historic homeland (and the majority of our people) is now within the U.S.S.R. This portion includes the Armenian S.S.R., Akhalkalak, Artsakh and Nakhichevan. All of these regions participate in a coordinated, multinational economic, social and political system. No one should deny that accumulated grievances cry out to be addressed; the cases of Akhalkalak, Nakhichevan and particularly Karabagh remain to be resolved through the cooperative understanding of Soviet Armenia, Soviet Georgia and Soviet Azerbaijan, with their state apparatuses and the popular consent of the populations in question. (Each one of these grievances, it should be noted, is demonstrably the result of years of violating a principled Leninist nationalities policy.) In the absence of any cooperative understanding (especially in the case of the increasingly chauvinist tendencies in Soviet Azerbaijan), populations denied their rights should be expected to turn to more forceful means of achieving self-determination.

The Armenian people have suffered terribly as a result of Turkish colonialism and imperialism. Happily, the greater portion of our people removed itself from the capitalist orbit long ago, and thus guaranteed their own physical security. Before socialist development could really get under way, however, Stalinist anti-democratic policies stifled progress. Ever since then, many socialist principles have been ignored, twisted or negated to one degree or another. Decades of associating nonsocialist policies with "really existing socialism" account in large measure for the present unpopularity of anything considered "socialist," as well as demands for secession from the U.S.S.R. Few of our compatriots have yet realized that, by correcting past anti-socialist policies and adopting a democratic socialist approach to the economy and society as a whole, we could enhance our people's level of self-determination far beyond anything possible in a capitalist system.

The greater portion of our historic homeland is currently within the

geopolitical frontiers of the Turkish state—a state whose representatives are still very much inspired by Turkish nationalist chauvinism. Turkey's social-economic system is based on the intensive exploitation of most of the economically productive members of society. Within Turkish borders, national self-determination for the Kurdish people, or for Armenians or any other national minorities, is out of the question at present.

So we must ask ourselves the question: "Will Armenian national self-determination in regions currently controlled by Ankara be feasible in the future? In addressing this question we must consider the two major possible outcomes I have attempted to describe in other essays<sup>44</sup>: (1) Those regions will remain in a future revolutionary Turkey and/or Kurdistan; and (2) At least some of the regions will be reintegrated into Soviet Armenia, thereby forming a more complete Armenian S.S.R. Since, as I have argued, national self-determination could be enhanced one day by a correct application of socialist principles, Armenians and non-Armenians alike could one day exercise self-determination in any regions reintegrated into Soviet Armenia.

(It bears emphasis that even within the very faulty system of the past, minority rights in Soviet Armenia have been upheld. To take one example, the Kurdish minority in Soviet Armenia has enjoyed a level of national self-determination far beyond that of Kurds in any part of the Kurdish homeland. Although this minority consists of only 60,000 members, they have equal social rights, full legal equality and the same economic rights as all other inhabitants. Furthermore, their national and cultural life is in every way facilitated and supported by the state and all institutions. If and when democratic socialism becomes a reality in the region, self-determination will be exercised by more than one nation occupying the same geographic territory.)

So what about the very possible scenario in which those regions are included in a future revolutionary socialist Turkey or Kurdistan? In my letter of June 11 and elsewhere, I have stated my opinion that, in this eventuality also, Armenian national self-determination would be just as feasible as Kurdish national self-determination in Soviet Armenia today. There are dozens of minorities in Turkey, and any future state which deserves to be called revolutionary and which has jurisdiction over that territory will have to develop a coherent policy to allow for the self-determination of these peoples. This will be one litmus test of the authenticity of the socialism proposed by the leadership of such a new state.

To bring this discussion to a close for now, it should be stated in an explicit and unequivocal manner that *the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle is a struggle for Armenian national self-determination in those parts of our homeland now in Turkey*. Having said this, however, we once again confront the fact that we can only be victorious as an integral part of the



revolutionary movement in the various regions of present-day Turkey. The Armenian struggle for national self-determination can only be carried out as an integral part of the struggles of all peoples within the borders of the chauvinist Turkish state for self-determination and socialism.

Now allow me to proceed to a subject I have long wanted to clarify: that of the deficiencies in the present positions of just about all revolutionary organizations in Turkey vis-a-vis the Armenian Question.

Today there are about eighty different organizations, parties, movements, groups and tendencies in Turkey which identify themselves as progressive, socialist, revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist or the like. This number is only very approximate and keeps varying due to internal divisions, the eventual disappearance of some, and so on. Most of these groups wish to represent the workers of Turkey, or the Kurdish national liberation struggle, or both. One of the reasons why so many different tendencies exist is that many leftists in Turkey are so sensitive to the need for profound and detailed political analyses that they have little tolerance for even slightly different political positions. This is why it is even more surprising to us that, to our knowledge, not a single one of them has yet drawn up a detailed, factual, coherent analysis of the nationalities question in general and of the Armenian question in particular. (My apologies to any organization that has done so without my being aware of it. I would very much appreciate being appraised of any such analysis.)

This lack of analysis is even more disconcerting, in view of the fact that the Turkish left had been very active for over twenty years prior to Evren's 1980 coup. To this day, however, I am aware of only a handful of organizations that have even attempted to elaborate official positions in relation to Armenian demands. What is more, a lingering Turkish chauvinism is evident even among these organizations (among which we may count the traditional Communist Party of Turkey, the T.K.P.).<sup>45</sup> To make matters even worse, this chauvinism is combined with a large dose of ignorance concerning the Armenian people and their history.

As Armenian revolutionaries, we recognize Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries as our comrades—our closest comrades with whom we must cooperate, with whom we must fight against our common enemy and build a common future. We have learned a lot from these comrades, and we have shared some of our experiences with them. Because of the importance we attach to these comrades, we would be remiss not to offer constructive criticisms of what we consider to be their deficiencies vis-a-vis the Armenian question. After all, the Armenian case is of focal interest to us, and it is

therefore our responsibility to spearhead the analyses and clarify the situation to all—to our people, to our Turkish and Kurdish comrades, to everyone. At the same time, we recognize that we, too, have deficiencies and have committed many errors. We accept constructive criticisms from our comrades, and we are prepared to take steps to address these criticisms. Constructive criticism is a necessary step in our future cooperation.

I do not have the necessary documentation in my cell to launch off into a separate critique of each of the political positions to which we have been exposed. Therefore, I will concentrate on what I consider to be one of the most advanced positions to date—that adopted recently by the Leninists of the Turkish Communist Party (T.K.P.-L.), also referred to as *Iscinin Sesi*. I will focus on the T.K.P.-L. position for the following reasons:

(1) The T.K.P.-L. was one of the first to draw up a position on the Armenian question, and they adopted it officially, as one point in their political program;

(2) Since the T.K.P.-L. position is indeed one of the most advanced positions yet taken by a Turkish group, a critique of it will automatically be a critique of more retrograde positions;

(3) The few other advanced positions of which I am aware are similar to the T.K.P.-L. position;

(4) Many Armenians are familiar with this position (largely because it was published in English), and it has generated discussions in Armenian circles.

First of all, let us point out that the T.K.P.-L. position was obviously drawn up on the basis of the rather minimal research they did on the Armenian people's situation. This is clear from the party's program, where it is stated that half of the 6.5 million Armenians in the world live in the U.S.S.R., while 100,000 live in Turkey. In 1981, when the political program was accepted, almost half of the world's Armenian population (almost three million) lived in the Armenian S.S.R. itself, while the U.S.S.R. as a whole counts almost two-thirds of the world's Armenians (over 4.5 million). At the same time in Turkey, there were about 80,000 people who still considered themselves to be Armenian.

We do not mean to nitpick over statistics. The only reason we make this observation is to better understand the degree of preparation that our comrades of the T.K.P.-L. had undertaken when they formulated their position.

Again, I do not want to appear petty, but the paragraphs in the T.K.P.-L. program dealing with the Armenian question contain terms which are neither well-defined nor appropriate, and other terms the implications of which they do not totally grasp. For example, the term "Turkish Armenia" conveys certain incorrect and anachronistic historic, political, cultural and demographic connotations (or does it have its origins in such



misunderstandings?). The Armenian homeland has always been the Armenian homeland. True, it has been militarily, economically and politically dominated throughout most of our history. Frequently, this domination has been by two or more foreign powers at the same time over different regions of our homeland. Thus, at the time of the genocide, most of our homeland was dominated by the Union and Progress chauvinists and the other major part by the czarist regime. But there was never a "Russian Armenia" nor a "Turkish Armenia." There was only an Armenian homeland, one part under czarist domination and the other part under Turkish chauvinist domination. Rather than "Turkish Armenia," it would be more accurate to refer to "that part of the Armenian homeland dominated by the Union and Progress regime." And today, the region might best be described as that part of the historic Armenian homeland now in Turkey, or now controlled by the Turkish state. In spite of the fact that almost no Armenians currently inhabit the region, the term "Turkish Armenia" is no better justified in a historical sense than are the terms "Turkish Syria," "Turkish Greece" or "Turkish Kurdistan."

The T.K.P.-L. program also refers to the term "Western Armenia." This term itself implies that the regions of our homeland now in Turkey are only one part of our homeland. Therefore, the use of this term is an admission that the Armenian homeland has been divided. (When I am forced to use this term, I put it in quotation marks.) As the T.K.P.-L. points out, the Armenian people have constantly been subjected to massacre and forced Islamization and Turkification under Turkish domination, culminating in the genocide of 1915-18. It should be emphasized, however, that the present division of our homeland was consolidated by the Turkish nationalists in 1920 (with readjustments up to 1923). In other words, the Turkish bourgeoisie has reshaped the frontiers of our homeland through violence and genocide, and in doing so they have uprooted and dispersed the Armenian people, creating an intolerable situation, from the point of view of Armenian national unity.

As the term "Western Armenia" implies, both our homeland and our people have been divided. In spite of this, however, the evolution of Armenian culture has been that of a single nation. As long as they have existed, Armenians have constituted a single people which has lived in a geographically unified homeland despite the political and military divisions imposed by various oppressor states. Since the Armenian nation is one, any truly internationalist solution to the Armenian question will include the right of our people to live in any part of our homeland, as well as providing for *measures to facilitate a continued homogeneous national and cultural life.*

Despite the implications of the term "Western Armenia," however, we find absolutely no mention at all in the T.K.P.-L. position of the right of the Armenian people to interact with their sisters and brothers across the border

in the U.S.S.R. That is why I feel they have overlooked a very important point in achieving the *minimum* rights of our people. Our minimum goal differs from their position primarily in that we recognize the need of guarantees for our people who may someday live in a future socialist Turkey or Kurdistan to have a special relationship in cultural and other domains with the Armenian S.S.R. By ignoring this very basic need, our comrades in the T.K.P.-L. seem to consider the present division of the Armenian people to be final.

At least in relation to the Kurdish case, the T.K.P.-L. appears to acknowledge that it is irrational to consider the present geopolitical frontiers of the chauvinist Turkish state to be final. In their program, however, they do not mention the slightest possibility of reintegrating at least some regions of the portion of our homeland currently in Turkey into Soviet Armenia. This is an inconsistent position for professed Leninists to assume. According to Lenin, "the Social-Democrats of the oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy. On the other hand," he continued,

. . . the Social-Democrats of the oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations; otherwise these Social-Democrats will involuntarily become the allies of their own national *bourgeoisie*, which *always* betrays the interests of the people and of democracy, and is *always* ready, in its turn, to annex territory and oppress other nations.<sup>46</sup>

In my opinion, Lenin is exactly correct on both accounts. Of course, he wrote this seven decades ago, so it is up to us to correctly interpret his views in our present situation. It is up to us to use the letter of Marxism in order to grasp the spirit of Marxism.

The present borders of Turkey are largely the result of annexation by Turkish chauvinists. The fact that these borders have been accorded a sacrosanct status by NATO planners should not keep Turkish revolutionaries from recognizing the democratic rights of *all* Armenians concerning the affairs of *all* parts of their historic homeland. The T.K.P.-L. admits that the existence of the Armenian diaspora is a result of the genocide, and it acknowledges the right of Armenians in the diaspora to freely return to their homeland, there to enjoy full democratic rights. While this again represents an advance over most other positions of the Turkish left, it still leaves too much unsaid. By only mentioning the democratic rights of diasporan



Armenians who return to the regions now in Turkey, they lead one to believe they do not recognize the democratic rights of the majority of our people in the U.S.S.R. who are also very attached to those parts of our homeland now in Turkey. At least half the Armenians of Soviet Armenia itself are descendants of those who, in the words of the T.K.P.-L., "were forced to emigrate from the lands on which they had lived for thousands of years"—i.e., the regions now in Turkey. It should be remembered, however, that Soviet Armenia is the other part of that continuous geographical homeland of which "Western Armenia" is a part. Now, if our comrades in the T.K.P.-L. realize that the Armenian people belong to a single nation, then they should recognize the right of all Armenian elements to determine the future of the Armenian nation as a whole. And this in practice means they must recognize the rights of Armenians in the U.S.S.R., and especially in the Armenian S.S.R., to have a say in the future of "Western Armenia."

This point can be illustrated by turning to another case close at hand. Kurds on both sides of the present-day borders of Turkey are nevertheless part and parcel of one whole Kurdish nation. Accordingly, all Kurds on both sides of that border have a right to democratically participate in the future of their nation in all parts of their homeland. The same goes for the Armenian people. Recognizing this, other comrades and I have argued that the Armenian patriotic liberation movement should not limit itself to the minimum goal as we have stated it. To limit ourselves to this minimum goal (which the T.K.P.-L. comes slightly short of anyway), would be to deny the democratic rights of the Armenians in Soviet Armenia. Revolutionaries in Turkey must come to terms with the reality of Soviet Armenia, and acknowledge that the people of Soviet Armenia are legitimately concerned with the future of other parts of their homeland.

I do not want to repeat what I have already said elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> Instead, I would like to turn my attention to some uncritical reactions of progressive Armenians to the T.K.P.-L. position.

Progressive Armenians are supposed to be in the forefront of clarifying the Armenian question for Armenians and non-Armenians alike. Unfortunately, judging by some of their responses, some of us have failed to fulfill this responsibility. An extreme indication of this failure is the knee-jerk reaction of some comrades who immediately applauded the T.K.P.-L. position as "faultless." Let us not forget that the T.K.P.-L.'s primary concern is not the Armenian struggle. Of course, like any other force in Turkey worthy of being called revolutionary, they must seriously consider all aspects of the present situation, and this includes the Armenian case. In a relative sense, the T.K.P.-L. position is an improvement, but in an absolute sense, it still does not comply with democratic principles and the reality of the Armenian people. This is a very significant deficiency on their part, and it

should receive criticism from our ranks.

Within the ranks of progressive Armenians, however, our self-criticism should be much more rigorous than our criticism of the T.K.P.-L. comrades. Just as Turkish revolutionaries have not yet totally obliterated the last traces of Turkish chauvinism, so too progressive Armenians have not yet freed themselves of the reactionary Armenian habit of automatically applauding the more or less "sympathetic" positions of non-Armenian forces. Just as bourgeois Armenian circles swoon over U.N. declarations and resolutions by the European Parliament, so similarly, our progressive comrades become ecstatic at the slightest recognition of our people's rights by Turkish revolutionaries. Of course, in practical terms the positions of Turkish revolutionary forces are *much more important* than U.N. resolutions, and they demand our close attention. But this attention should take the form of sober assessment, not uncritical applause. We should encourage our Turkish comrades, and assist them in addressing remaining deficiencies. This is the way revolutionary criticism works, and it is the basis upon which cooperation is built.

Your comrade,  
Monte



*This section consists of an excerpt from a letter to a comrade in the United States. The letter was dated September 22, 1988.*

### REPLY TO A COMRADE

Dear Comrade,

In your last letter you brought up the question of a conflict between nationalism and communism. You wrote that at some point, perhaps in the distant future, every case of nationalism must come into conflict with the goals of a classless society. The reason for this, you say, is that as class differentiations disappear, national divisions will disappear along with "national classes" and national markets.

In response, I would like to say first that, since we are speaking of the very distant future, my remarks will be of a rather speculative character. Even so, I think some cautious projections can be averred.

I agree with you about the prospects for diminishing national differentiation. The European Economic Community, as well as imperialist cartels and the like, have born out Marx and Engels' prediction in the *Communist Manifesto*: along with a dynamic expansion of the forces of production and their concentration in fewer and fewer hands, capitalism globalizes erstwhile national markets. Meanwhile, as Comecom and other international arrangements among the noncapitalist countries indicate, all modern economic systems have evolved toward a multinational and multistate integration of previously national economies.

I disagree, however, with your assumption that diminishing differentiation will necessarily translate into complete cultural homogeneity. I cannot foresee any future development on the road toward "the higher phase of the communist mode of production" which will obviate this attachment entirely. We do, of course, agree that economic development guarantees human physical, intellectual and cultural development. And we also agree that it is likely that future economic development will continue to cause nations to lose their character as independent economic units. Nevertheless, socialism and communism can—and in my opinion *should*—serve to advance each people's cultural identity and evolution.

Yes, it is conceivable that an entirely new sort of person will come into existence in the far, far distant future—a new communist person for whom the terms "mine" and "thine" (as in "my nation" or "your nation") will no longer be of much relevance. Even if we accept this as a possibility, however, we should admit that any number of other things could happen, too. There is not much to indicate that a nonexclusive and nonaggressive attachment of people to their homeland and national culture will be irrelevant to a classless society. In fact, why shouldn't an attachment to one's homeland remain a

sign of intellectual and psychological stability, as it is today? Perhaps, as national classes, violent class conflict and national antagonisms diminish, more people will be able to appreciate the most immediate culture or homeland, without thereby denigrating or resenting those of neighboring peoples.

You have probably figured out by now that I do not believe that cultural homogeneity is particularly desirable as a normative goal, even in the far distant future. Indeed, from a socialist perspective, cultural diversity and the attachment of a people to their land is laudable in this era of neocolonialism and imperialism. Unfortunately, the pervasiveness of cultural imperialism has lead many people—even people on the left—into bad habits of thought, including an automatic suspicion of any and all diversity. (Indeed, in Armenian, English and other languages, "difference" is often used as a synonym for "conflict.") Sometimes, without being aware of it, we find ourselves reacting against the spurious "variety" and shallow individualism of pervasive Yankee consumer culture by embracing its hidden, but all the more strident, imperative for cultural conformity.

Indeed, rather than cultural homogeneity, under communism we may very well expect national-cultural diversity to greatly increase. A social formation dominated by a mode of production which meets needs without encouraging competitive consumption may constitute a "base" which could make possible a "superstructure" of great scientific, artistic and philosophical breadth and variety. Although the means of transportation and communication can be expected to continue to burgeon, we should also expect that more regional patterns of cultural variation will be evident, as well as variations based on such "national" attributes as a common language. So in this and other respects, cultural identity could be considered an extension of national identity.

I myself do not see any conflict in principle between Armenian patriotism and our goal of communism—not even a conflict in the distant future. On the contrary, as I have tried to hint, a case could be made that intellectually and psychologically stable people will and *should* continue to cultivate a national identity within a communist society. So to me it makes no sense to ask whether one is fighting for the Armenian people *or* for communism. It is not an "either/or" situation; the two struggles are inseparable. What is more, we—you and I—can most practically serve the long-term interests of communism by participating in the socialist revolution in that part of our homeland currently under Ankara's control. In this way, our duties as patriots really do dovetail with our duties as internationalists.

Now I would like to touch on several more pressing issues you brought up.

As for your reference to long-term goals, I will start by referring you to "Long-Term Organizational Perspectives . . ." <sup>48</sup> That text, among other things, suggests that the proposed Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement



(A.P.L.M.) be considered a provisional working organization with an indispensable role to fulfill during a transitional period, viz. the period leading up to socialist revolution in our homeland now in Turkey and the re-establishment of Armenian collective national life there. Yes, our activities should be seen as contributing to the ultimate goal of achieving communism, and the A.P.L.M. should be seen very broadly as a means to that end; nevertheless, we should realize that it is a temporary tool, appropriate to one key period in this long, long-term task. After the socialist revolution and achievement of Armenian national rights in the region, the *raison d'être* of the A.P.L.M. will fade away. At that time, if all our struggle's objectives have been met, the A.P.L.M. may choose to fuse with the main socialist forces in the Armenian S.S.R. or a new revolutionary political formation of the new socialist Kurdistan or Turkey (on condition that all of our policies are included in the new program). Thus, it is possible that our work to build socialism, and ultimately to achieve communism, may continue within the ranks of these latter parties, just as some of them may eventually fuse with socialist forces in Armenia.

Thus, if we limit our discussion to the goals of the A.P.L.M., then the creation of communism is not included, for the sole reason that this long, long-term task will far outlive the A.P.L.M. On the other hand, if we wish to talk about our own theoretical goals, then communism lies far, far down the road, while our practical tasks within the A.P.L.M. lie immediately before us.

Further down in your letter you expressed misgivings about "blurting out" our long-term goals, in view of the low level of ideological understanding of most diasporan Armenians. Well, "blurting things out" is seldom the best way to communicate. On the other hand, however, we do need to undertake and publicize exhaustive, detailed analyses of all aspects of our situation. The questions of communism, class allegiances, and so on should be spelled out very clearly. What we need is clarity, and this despite the initially low ideological preparation of most diasporan Armenians.

Of course there are those who advise against laying our red cards on the table, saying this might alienate or scare off one or another individual or section of our people. The peevish souls who recommend such "circumspection" (i.e., dishonesty) on our part just plain do not understand the political and organizational character of the kind of vanguard we need, nor do they understand our people or our present situation as a whole. Everything should be focused on the practical steps we have to take to build our struggle within Turkey. Now, who will take those steps? Deukmejian supporters in the U.S.? Comfortable suburbanites in France or Australia? I think not. Rather, the front-ranked militants of our struggle—and the first audience of our message—should be our highly motivated sisters and brothers in Turkey,

Iran and the immediate vicinity. In the past, these comrades have not only *demand*ed that we be explicit about our politics, but they themselves have joined organizations with titles such as "Turkish Marxist-Leninist Organizations" and "ASALA Supporters—Marxist Group."

Another consideration: Our struggle will largely depend on our vanguard's relations to other revolutionary organizations in Turkey. They too will demand clarity from us.

And as for other Armenians throughout the diaspora, our experience with ASALA shows that they will define their positions toward us largely on the basis of our actual military activity against the Turkish state. For most of them, our ideological orientation will be of little interest, as long as we have a presence (however great or small it may be) in our homeland. The situation may be analogous to the relationship between dyed-in-the-wool capitalist members of the Ramgavar Party and the rhetorically socialist leadership of the Armenian S.S.R., which they willingly support. In any case, we should not compromise the requirements of our focal struggle, just to avoid stirring up the allergies of far-off ideological hypochondriacs who are unlikely ever to participate directly in the struggle under any banner.

One final note on this point: My experience has been that reactionaries are usually more reactionary than they are stupid. Even if you try to be vague about your political line, their instincts will eventually lead them to identify you as what you are.

You also brought up the question of simplifying and popularizing propaganda. A point well taken. However, in relation to the political manifesto and program of the A.P.L.M., this advice should be ignored. These documents should be detailed, systematic and factual. If that means repeating ourselves, or writing bone-dry prose, then so be it. Better to be tedious or repetitious than risk confusion. There is a difference between mass education on the one hand, and the drawing up of a political manifesto and program of a vanguard organization, on the other. Once we have set these latter documents in order, we may publish simplified or otherwise popularized tracts.

Further on, you brought up the subject of Nakhichevan. Reading the second draft of the "Definitions" text,<sup>49</sup> you will notice that this problem has been explained in a slightly more satisfactory manner. Let me repeat what I have said there: Nakhichevan has been an integral part of the Armenian homeland since the beginning of recorded history in the region. Despite the wars, massacres and famines leading up to 1920, approximately 57% of the population of Nakhichevan remained Armenian. Nevertheless, in the 1920s, the region was arbitrarily separated from Soviet Armenia and put under the administration of the Azerbaijan S.S.R. This decision flew in the face of all historic, demographic and economic realities, and can only be seen



as a step to improve relations with a national-chauvinist Turkey at a time when the U.S.S.R. was under attack from within and without. (Also, the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R.—including Lenin—erroneously assessed Ataturk's movement, considering it to be a potential ally.) Meanwhile, under the administration of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., the authorities of this republic pressured Armenians in various ways to leave the region.

In spite of this, however, the region remains economically closer to Soviet Armenia than to Soviet Azerbaijan (indeed, Nakhichevan's administrative isolation from Soviet Armenia is the main reason for the inflated prices of consumer goods there). In spite of the low percentage of Armenians in Nakhichevan today, if the region were reintegrated into Soviet Armenia instead of being artificially excluded, then Soviet Armenia would still be left with an overwhelming demographic majority of Armenians. In other words, no one should be forced to accept the arbitrary and artificial separation of Nakhichevan from Soviet Armenia, for any reason whatsoever. That would be like claiming that, since the majority of people in Northern Ireland are pro-British, the seven counties should—in the name of "self-determination"—remain a colony of Britain. There is more to self-determination than what the latest census shows. The entire population of Nakhichevan is only about 200,000. If reunited with Soviet Armenia, the population would likely increase, as the administratively induced demographic shift of the past decades is reversed.

You yourself provide a good principle which you should apply to Nakhichevan: "It could be objected," you write,

that it is counterrevolutionary to sanctify *faits accomplis* imposed upon peoples victimized by imperialism. This is as true for Armenians as it is for Palestinians. Just because imperialists have more or less successfully displaced a people from its historic homeland, this is no excuse for disparaging the struggle of that people. On the contrary, it is a good reason for *intensifying* armed struggle against the usurpers, to create a *new reality*.

I could not agree more.

Unfortunately, both you and the friend from Dev Yol<sup>50</sup> do not seem to understand how this principle applies to the Armenian people. According to you, the friend from Dev Yol holds that "Regardless of historical circumstances surrounding the current demographic realities of Eastern Anatolia, the fact remains that Armenians do not constitute a national formation on that land."

Two comments on this passage: (1) The phrase "Regardless of historical circumstances..." already betrays an outright acceptance of a *fait accompli* created through genocide and maintained by the NATO-Ankara axis; (2) Furthermore, if the friend from Dev Yol were to overcome his narrow prejudice in favor of the "integrity" of Turkey's present borders, and if for once he considered the Armenian homeland as a whole, instead of Turkey as a whole, then he would realize that not only do the Armenian people constitute a "national formation" in our homeland, but they also constitute a plurality of the total population throughout the Armenian homeland. For me, it is absolutely mind-boggling how supposed "revolutionaries" can claim to overlook this.

As for yourself, you mention "the peculiarities of the Armenian situation." I am not sure what you meant by this. In any case, I would be surprised if any "peculiarities" existed which, as you claim, would require a "breach of the principle of self-determination." No one is insisting that these areas be united with Soviet Armenia. On the other hand, no one has the right to insist they not be so united. The only correct and realistic position right now is to recognize the right of the Armenian people in principle to possibly reincorporate these regions into Soviet Armenia. Internationalist organizations in Turkey should explicitly recognize this right and add it to their political agenda. This, for us, should be a litmus test for the sincerity of such organizations.

I also find your following statement to be completely at odds with democratic principles and inconsistent with your own admonition not to sanctify *faits accomplis* established by imperialism: "But it would be a violation of the principle of self-determination to agitate for the creation of an Armenian demographic majority in eastern Anatolia, with a view to one day uniting it with the Armenian S.S.R."

I wonder what aspect of the principle of self-determination you are referring to here—especially in view of the historic and present context of developments concerning the Armenian homeland and people. I myself think we should struggle for the right of our people to live in our homeland now in Turkey. This in itself could possibly lead to the reintegration of some territories currently controlled by Turkey into Soviet Armenia—and, as I have attempted to point out more than once before, there is nothing wrong with that.

Now if, as you say, the future political affiliation of eastern Anatolia should be decided by "popular referendum," we are still confronted with a number of questions: Who should participate in this referendum? Should the referendum take place right after the liberation of the area or after a period in which refugees and descendants of refugees are allowed to return to the area? What areas should be included in the referendum, and how



should they be divided? Referendum, yes. But what *kind* of referendum?

Toward the end of your letter you return to the statements of the Dev Yol friend: "A national minority should have the right to self-determination. But this right presupposes their demographic, geographical and political *ability* to separate off from the larger state (else there really would be nothing for the people in question to determine for themselves!)."

Well, I am happy that your friend at least implicitly accepts the fact that the Armenian case concerns the demand for self-determination (which in turn includes the possibility of reintegrating into Soviet Armenia regions currently in Turkey). At least his statements imply this, even though he himself may not realize it.

It has been my experience that far too many of our progressive Turkish friends still do not even consider the role of Soviet Armenia and the 4.5 million Armenians of the U.S.S.R. in their assessment of the Armenian question. I recommend that these friends begin to do so, and that they consider for a moment that in our case, the "larger state" to which our Dev Yol friend refers is in fact the U.S.S.R. If they do these things, then I believe it will be clearer that they need to make an explicit statement on the possibility of border rectifications with the Armenian S.S.R., as well as the fact that the Armenian question in present-day Turkey is not simply that of a national minority within Turkey.

I know many members of Turkish progressive organizations, and the statements of your friend from Dev Yol strike me as typical. Far too often they tend to ignore anything outside the present borders of Turkey (although they have begun recently to pay more attention to Kurdish regions outside of Turkey). Their myopia is especially acute when it comes to Soviet Armenia. It is our responsibility to enlighten them about this. Before they can justifiably lay claim to the title of Communists and internationalists, they must get over their habit of eternalizing the present frontiers of the Turkish state.

I realize that my responses to your questions are cursory, and I apologize for that. Please send my best regards to the comrades. The support of the C.D.A.P.P.<sup>51</sup> is much appreciated.

In solidarity,  
Monte

## Notes:

1. ASALA (acronym for the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), a rhetorically left-wing armed group based in Beirut, was active in the late seventies and the early eighties. Melkonian was a member of this group until the violent split which took place in 1983. The A.R.F. (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, also referred to as the Dashnak Party) is a right-wing political party. —Ed.
2. Monte did not characterize the struggle in which he participated as a *national* liberation movement. Presumably, this was because of the existence on a portion of the Armenian homeland of what he considered to be a sovereign state structure, namely, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia and its successor, the Republic of Armenia. —Ed.
3. A detailed assessment of ASALA operations appears in the undated text entitled *ASALA: The Reality*. Apparently, Melkonian had a hand in this collectively written text, which appeared under the signature of ASALA-R.M. —Ed.
4. This term appears as an entry in section three of the previous chapter. The first time a term listed in that glossary appears in this and following chapters, it is marked with an asterisk (\*). —Ed.
5. Melkonian is referring here of course to ASALA chief, "Hagop Hagopian" (Minas Ohanessian). In 1988, Hagopian was assassinated in Greece by unknown gunmen, evidently a short time after being expelled from ASALA. —Ed.
6. Refer to the glossary entry "Native Peoples of Turkey," in section three of Chapter One, above. —Ed.
7. Refer to "Armenian-Turkish Dialog," in Chapter Four, below. —Ed.
8. These actions were seldom ever claimed in the name of the A.R.F. Instead, they were executed under several names, most frequently "The Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide." —Ed.
9. Here we have listed only basic points concerning the A.R.F.'s strategy, and in particular, its decision to initiate armed propaganda. This subject will be dealt with in further detail in a separate study. —MM  
It is not clear to which study Monte is referring, or whether he ever undertook it. —Ed.
10. The Ankara airport attack took place on August 7, 1982. Sixty-six people were wounded and ten people were killed in the attack, including one of the three attackers. Another attacker, Levon Ekmekjian, was apprehended and later executed by hanging. The suicide attack in the Istanbul Bazaar took place on June 16, 1983. Twenty-seven people were wounded in this attack, and three were killed, including the attacker, Mgo Madarian. —Ed.



11. On July 15, 1983, a bomb exploded at the Turkish Airlines check-in counter at Orly Airport, resulting in sixty-one wounded and eight fatalities. Due to the accumulated contradictions within ASALA, a few hours before the Orly bombing a violent conflict broke out between the "Hagop Hagopian" followers and the patriotic members who then formed ASALA-R.M.

The July 27, 1983, suicide attack on the Turkish embassy in Lisbon was executed by a group which owed its allegiance to the A.R.F. One attacker was killed by an embassy guard, while the other four died at their own hands when they blew up the building. Two other people were also killed. (Source: ASALA-R.M. *A Critique of Armenian Armed Action, from the Early 1970s through 1983*. Kaytzer, London, unknown date.) —Ed.

12. This figure and the following population figures in the paragraph, of course, are Monte's 1984 estimates. —Ed.
13. Other Armenians—even those who consider themselves more American, French or Australian than Armenian—can and probably will help in the struggle in various peripheral ways, provided the struggle is already organized and the wheel is turning. Hopefully, some will eventually choose to join their struggling compatriots in and around Turkey. In any case, we should not wait for the majority of them to take any initiatives or venture near a still incipient struggle. —MM
14. Let it also be noted that the rug merchant "wisdom" of demanding a lot (implementation of the Treaty of Sevres?) to get a little (Kars and Ardahan, perhaps?) does not apply here. There will be no bazaar haggling over Armenia. There will only be a bitter struggle for our rights during which the size of our force and the correctness of our action will decide the final form Armenian national self-determination will take. —MM
15. Refer to the fourth and fifth sections of the present chapter for a further discussion of the T.K.P.-L. position. —Ed.
16. Since this was written, a number of other Turkish groups, including the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Turkey, and the Turkish Communist Party (T.K.P.) have adopted resolutions regarding Armenians which are similar to the T.K.P.-L. position. —Ed.
17. The latest events in Artsakh and Soviet Armenia show that perhaps even without diasporan initiative our compatriots may eventually take their own initiatives concerning our struggle in Turkey. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]
18. Of course, until now not even Turkish and Kurdish organizations have been very successful in this field. —MM

Recently, however, the Kurdish national liberation struggle has taken root in Kurdistan and made headway. —MM [Preceding paragraph added June 1990. —Ed.]

19. In any case, eventually we will have to supplement this sort of cooperation by undertaking our own ideological work among local populations. —MM
20. At roughly the time this text was written (1984), Melkonian was participating in a collective project to work up pedagogical materials for the preparation of cadres. A year earlier, he had written a guerrilla training manual, entitled *Manual for the Training of a People's Fighter*. —Ed.
21. It should be kept in mind that this homeland may conceivably come to include Akhalkalak, Karabagh, Nakhichevan and/or certain contiguous territories currently within the borders of the Turkish state. —MM
22. That is, second generation diasporan Armenians moved from the status of workers to that of merchants, small shop owners, business executives, professionals, etc. Others shifted into the middle- and big bourgeoisies of their respective countries. And even among those who remained wage earners—especially those in imperialist countries—many shifted squarely into the domain of bourgeois cultural hegemony. —MM
23. The sad exceptions to this claim are the communities in Lebanon and Turkey. —MM
24. And, indeed, in the text entitled "Definitions" they are not counted as members of the Armenian nation. —MM [Refer to "Definitions," in Chapter One, above. —Ed.]
25. As was mentioned above, Armenians from the Soviet diaspora should also be allowed to relocate to such regions. —MM
26. Refer to "Why Soviet Armenia Does Not Currently Constitute a Total Response to Armenian Aspirations," in Chapter Four, below. —Ed.
27. Refer to "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora," in Chapter Three, below. —Ed.
28. Refer to "Assimilation and Alternatives" in Chapter Four of this volume. —Ed.
29. Refer to the previous section, above. —Ed.
30. Ibid.
31. Today a huge number of Soviet Armenians are agitating for independence. It will be interesting to see how opinions evolve and change as the population gains more political experience and exposure to the outside world. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]
32. The official seal of the Armenian S.S.R. is the only seal of a Soviet Republic which features a (terrestrial) landmark outside the present borders of the Soviet Union. The flag of the Soviet republic—with its red



field at the top with the hammer and sickle and the blue center stripe—represents the borders of the Soviet republic, bounded by the Arax River, while the red field at the bottom represents the occupied part of Armenia—that is, those regions currently within the control of the Turkish state. —MM.

33. These are pre-1988 figures. —MM
34. One may gain an insight into Soviet policy vis-a-vis border disputes with neighbors by studying the cases of disputes with Japan and China, as well as territorial adjustments with Finland, Poland and Rumania. Also, one should study Soviet involvement in Mongolia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. After studying that, one should consider Soviet-Turkish border issues—especially during the periods 1918-23, 1941-42, 1945-53—and the issue of Ani. All of this, combined with growing self-confidence in Soviet Armenia and gradually increasing sympathy in the U.S.S.R. in general, might give a hint as to the likelihood of a future Soviet initiative west of the Arax. —MM.
35. Refer to Chapter Four, below. —Ed.
36. Refer to "A Letter on Self-Determination," above. The term "Armenian elements" had a special technical meaning for Melkonian. It designates Armenians and Armenians native to the homeland,\* as well as ("assimilated" and "nonassimilated") diasporan Armenians. In addition, it includes not only individual members of the nation but also corporate members, such as associations, political parties and other community institutions. —Ed.
37. Refer to the present chapter, above. —Ed.
38. Lenin, V.I. *The National Liberation Movement in the East*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1952, p. 89. My underlining. —MM
39. Ibid., pp. 85-6. —MM
40. Ibid., p. 86. —MM
41. Ibid., pp. 86-7. In the passage cited, of course, Kautsky speaks of abnormality exclusively in the sense of lack of conformity with what is best adapted to the requirements of developing capitalism. —MM
42. By the early 1990s it has become clear that Armenia has indeed set out on the path of what is euphemistically called "capitalist development" in countries under imperialist domination. —Ed.
43. Lenin, p. 90. —MM
44. Refer to "The Orientation of Our Goal," above. —Ed.
45. Since this article was written, the Turkish Communist Party (T.K.P.) has adopted a position vis-a-vis Armenians which is very similar to that of the T.K.P.-L.'s earlier position. —Ed.
46. No reference given. —Ed.
47. In "The Orientation of Our Goal" and "The Question of Strategy," for

example. Refer to the first and second sections of the present chapter. —Ed.

48. Refer to "Long-Term Organizational Perspectives for the Armenian Revolutionary Movement" in Chapter Three, below. —Ed.
49. Refer to Chapter One, above. —Ed.
50. The left-wing Turkish group Devrimci Yol, or Revolutionary Path, has been described as a "freewheeling" Marxist organization. It was especially active in the early seventies. —Ed.
51. The Committee for the Defense of Armenian Political Prisoners. —Ed.



*Chapter Three*  
**ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS**



Dated June 6, 1986, "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora" was first published by the London-based Kaytzer group in April 1987 as part of a pamphlet entitled "Organizational Questions of the Diaspora and Correspondence with Monte Melkonian." The text which appears below, together with the letter of December 2, 1986, which follows, is a slightly revised version of the first seventeen pages of the pamphlet. ("The Question of Strategy," included in the preceding chapter, was drawn from the same pamphlet.)

In his thirty-two page Self-Criticism,<sup>1</sup> Monte took himself to task for once having subscribed to "... this mistaken idea that it was possible, and indeed necessary, for all progressive movements, groups and individuals throughout the Armenian diaspora to unite into one organization with one political line." Evidently, by the time he wrote "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora," he had disabused himself of this "mistaken idea."

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### ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE DIASPORA

Ever since the revival of progressive political tendencies in the diaspora twenty-one years ago, the organization of a pan-diaspora movement capable of struggling for our people's right to live in our homeland has proven very difficult in practice. Through trial and much error, and over the course of much ideological evolution, we have become better able to understand some basic guidelines to be followed for such a task.

In the past, many generalizations have been made that appeal to emotion, rather than actual conditions on the ground. Our theoretical errors were compounded, as attempts were made to base practical work on these ill-founded generalizations. Take, for example, the common claim that since we are all Armenians,<sup>2</sup> we are all motivated to struggle for our right to live in our homeland. Such a notion was perhaps emotionally satisfying for many, but in practical terms it hindered our political and organizational development. By resorting to sentimental generalities like this, we rendered ourselves incapable of seeing ourselves and the diaspora as we really are. Without realizing it, we tended to ignore important differences between communities in the diaspora, such as widely varying degrees of assimilation. Furthermore, we tended to overlook important differences within each community, such as the diversity of class interests.

As a result of these errors we often wasted much time and energy trying to "revolutionize" members of one community or another whose class status or level of assimilation made it very unlikely that many of them could ever be mobilized around the revolutionary principles necessary for the Armenian



armed struggle. By putting all diasporan Armenians\* on the same level of socio-political potential, we were unable to sift out confused, malignant and even hostile influences within one or another diasporan community. Moreover, by painting the whole diaspora with a wide brush, we were unable to take advantage of whatever real potential existed in these communities.

The lesson from these errors should be clear: In order to organize ourselves as a vanguard, and in order to avail ourselves of all other kinds of secondary potential, we need to develop a sounder theoretical basis for our political practice. In an attempt to create such a theoretical basis—an attempt which was perhaps well-intentioned but nevertheless far off the mark—some progressive Armenians began in the late seventies to make other generalizations which were also inapplicable to the diaspora. Using terms such as “Armenian bourgeoisie,” “Armenian petty bourgeoisie,” “Armenian working class” and the like, the several proponents of this new approach considered their views to be “Marxist analyses.” In fact, however, these “analyses” were a caricature of scientific socialism. True, they did represent an advance of sorts, since there was at least a recognition of the need to take class interests into account when assessing the revolutionary potential of the diaspora. However, no meaningful effort was made to situate class analysis within the context of each region, country or community of the diaspora. Instead, class divisions were supposed to run the entire length of one hypothetical diasporan whole.

It is true that analyses of the class makeup and class interests of diasporan communities are necessary to determine our overall revolutionary potential and the correct means of organizing that potential. But such analyses should not proceed from a pan-diaspora starting point, for the simple reason that the diaspora does not constitute one economic totality. Rather, it is a constellation of variously defined communities existing under a wide variety of conditions. (Perhaps the only things all diasporan communities have in common are their Armenian origins and their exclusion from the Armenian homeland.\*) Bourgeois Armenian elements in Lebanon, the United States or Argentina by no means constitute an “Armenian bourgeoisie.” Nor do Armenians who are wage earners in Iran, France and Australia make up an “Armenian working class.” The contexts in which these Armenians live, work, exploit or are exploited are just too different and too distant from one another to lump such people into common classes. A French capitalist of Armenian origin exploits workers within the jurisdiction of the French state. He pays wages in francs and has French unions to contend with. Similarly, an Armenian who is a worker in Argentina is paid in Argentine currency, and will more than likely have to contend with Argentine capitalists.

Adding to the complexity is the fact that, in certain cases, diasporan Armenians who are members of the same class in different countries may

have very different economic interests. This is especially clear when we compare the “intermediate classes” in imperialist countries with those in the so-called Third World. Many petty-bourgeois Iranian Armenians, for example, are motivated to participate directly in the armed struggle against the Turkish regime, whereas very few petty-bourgeois Armenians in the U.S. are likely ever to leave their homes and shops to take up arms in Turkey.\* (Of course, a serious comparison of classes in different communities would require a much longer discussion, one not restricted to their potential activity in our patriotic liberation struggle. I mention these examples just for the sake of illustration.)

The simplistic categorization of “Armenian classes” in the diaspora can be even more confusing, because of the lack of direct economic relations among these classes. No exploiter-exploited relations exist, for example, between a Syrian-Armenian worker and a Canadian-Armenian factory owner. And even within the context of a single country or community, we find that “Armenian classes” do not exist. With few exceptions, Armenian workers are employed by non-Armenian bosses, and Armenian bosses employ mostly non-Armenian workers. And this general observation holds everywhere, with only limited exceptions such as certain Armenian-owned factories in Lebanon which employ a large proportion of Armenian workers and other smaller Armenian-owned businesses in various communities which employ Armenian workers. Armenian workers, then, make up a part of one or another local working class, while Armenian shop owners can be counted as members of local petty-bourgeois classes.

All of this does *not* go to prove that a discussion of class divisions and interests is irrelevant to an analysis of the diaspora. On the contrary, a systematic consideration of all factors affecting our people—prominently including class factors—are absolutely necessary for the effective mobilization of our human and material resources, to recreate some form of Armenian national life within our historic homeland now controlled by the Turkish state. These factors should be studied in their proper contexts, however. In the late 1980s, it is neither realistic nor in any way useful to lump relatively independent segments of our people into ambiguous categories. Class analyses should be conducted, but they should be conducted on a country-by-country, community-by-community basis. Only after painstaking analysis can we begin to understand where certain interests converge and where others conflict, within the larger context of the diaspora. As many people have noted, the task of organizing our people is a very complex one. The sentimentally appealing but inaccurate generalizations of the past must be avoided.

Although there is no room here to present a full analysis of the diaspora, I will outline some of the guiding principles for such an effort. First of all, it should be emphasized that we (I am speaking here of ASALA-R.M.<sup>3</sup>)



should approach this question with the goal of mounting a diasporan initiative to form an Armenian armed presence capable of participating in the developing revolution within Turkey. Of course, this task is bound to be very, very difficult. Nevertheless, we consider it to be the most worthwhile option realistically open to us.

Many Armenians prefer to pin all their hopes on some sort of "international solution." Others hope for intervention by Soviet Armenia or the U.S.S.R. While not discounting some form of possible future intervention by the modern Armenian state, we prefer to concentrate on what we can do now. We refuse to sit around passively, waiting for others to find a solution for us. Rather, we intend to do our best with whatever potential the diaspora can muster. (In fact, such an initiative by the diaspora now could help to create the conditions necessary for a future initiative by the quantitatively and qualitatively more significant part of our nation in Soviet Armenia). This effort was begun years ago, and with our accumulated experience, we'll persevere with more efficiency in the future.

After what has been said so far, the question arises: If the diaspora today is so heterogeneous, and if each community has evolved into a relatively independent entity, then how realistic is it to even contemplate organizing a movement for our patriotic liberation struggle? This question must be answered on different levels.

### THE VANGUARD

Of central importance to our future struggle in Turkey is the preparation of a vanguard force capable of doing the actual work on the ground in eastern Anatolia. Without such a force, all other efforts in the diaspora (as dynamic as they may appear to be locally) will, in the end, have little if any concrete effect on the redistribution of forces within our historic homeland, where virtually no Armenians currently live.

The question remains, however, who will make up this vanguard core of our struggle? Who will be willing to go through the immense hardships necessary in our armed struggle within Turkey?

Obviously, the people most likely to form the vanguard of our struggle are those Armenians "objectively" motivated to live in a socialist Armenian homeland—that is, those for whom a socialist homeland represents a solution to the economic, social, cultural and political problems they face on a daily basis. Those whose current conditions of life force them to seek a new life in Armenia\* are those who will be most dedicated to our struggle. Surveying the diaspora as a whole, then, there are two important communities which will provide the bulk of such highly motivated elements. These are the Armenian communities in Turkey and Iran.



### Armenians in Turkey

The Armenian community in Turkey, which numbers approximately 80,000, is largely a diasporan community, since the vast majority of Turkish-Armenians live in Istanbul, and very few still inhabit parts of the Armenian homeland. Although this community includes its share of reactionary collaborators, as a whole it is continually oppressed by chauvinist state policies. These policies are aimed at totally annihilating the last traces of Armenian culture\* in Turkey. Thus, our historic national enemy, the reactionary Turkish regime, is still responsible for the daily cultural oppression of these people. As a result, Armenians in Turkey are faced with three alternatives: forced assimilation, forced emigration or struggle for cultural and national rights.

For the few rich Armenians in Turkey whose economic ties to the status quo are substantial, cultural oppression is more than bearable. This, however, is not the case for the majority of the community. The intensity of economic exploitation in Turkey far surpasses that of most countries with important diasporan Armenian communities. There are considerable numbers of Armenian workers and peasants who, like their Turkish and Kurdish\* counterparts, are being pushed further and further down, into terrible poverty.

Because of this, revolutionary workers' organizations have sprouted up everywhere. And despite heavy setbacks since the *coup d'etat* in 1980, these groups are steadily regaining lost momentum.

Armenian workers, students and youth have integrated themselves into these movements as a means for struggling for both radical socio-economic transformation and for an end to national oppression. The exalted names of Garbis Altinoghlu, Orhan Bakir, Murat Shaghkal, "Krikor" and other revolutionary figures testify to this fact. Their sacrifices should remind us that members of this community are highly motivated to struggle within Turkey for Armenian national rights.

The reason for this is not far to see: The same Turkish state which denies us all the right to live in our homeland directly exploits and oppresses Armenians in Turkey. And since, in addition, these same Armenians are best adapted to the social, political, cultural and geographical context of our future struggle, it is absolutely imperative that an Armenian vanguard organization recruit them. Without the contribution of highly motivated and strategically located Armenians in Turkey, other diasporan Armenians will not be able to integrate themselves into the struggle in eastern Anatolia.

### Armenians in Iran

Another highly motivated and strategically located Armenian community is that of Iran (which now numbers approximately 150,000 members).



During the regime of the Shah, Armenian cultural and political life was limited. Unfortunately, however, the situation has not appreciably improved under the current fundamentalist religious regime. Today, Armenian culture, language and social values are under attack from many sides. Thus, this community (which is still very attached to Armenian culture) feels an acute need to establish a collective life in the Armenian homeland.

Furthermore, economic conditions in Iran make the physical existence of the Armenian community difficult. At present, about thirty percent of the community is either unemployed or underemployed. Another large section is composed of workers, skilled workers and peasants who farm small plots. All of these people are motivated, for economic as well as cultural reasons, to struggle for the right to live in a socialist Armenian homeland. In addition, many Armenians who are members of the Iranian petty bourgeoisie are also motivated to participate directly in the struggle since, in the present situation, their position is very precarious.

As in Turkey, so too in Iran: the necessary objective and subjective conditions exist to form a vanguard organization. Furthermore, the geographic location of these two communities—the only two diasporan communities with direct access to the Turkish-controlled Armenian homeland—make their recruitment a precondition without which the rest of the diaspora could do very little to constitute itself as a force within Turkey.

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A vanguard organization needs a revolutionary ideology which is applicable to the struggle, and it needs to be able to put that ideology into practice, within the geographical context of the struggle. *This is why the vanguard organization of the diaspora will necessarily be comprised for the most part of highly motivated Turkish and Iranian Armenians, and will be based in Turkey and Iran.*

#### OTHER COMMUNITIES WITH IMPORTANT NUMBERS OF HIGHLY MOTIVATED ELEMENTS

On the periphery of Turkey, but outside direct geographic contact with the Armenian homeland, there are several other communities which may provide significant numbers of recruits for the vanguard.

##### Armenians in Lebanon

The Armenian community in Lebanon, with its approximately 150,00 members, is another community which is very attached to Armenian culture, and generally in favor of reconstituting a collective national existence in our

homeland. Unfortunately, this community's cultural activity and political effectiveness has diminished, as a consequence of the war and the resulting mass emigration. Nevertheless, the Lebanese-Armenian community is still an important source of patriotic activity. Of course, for some members of the community, "patriotic activity" has been limited to folkloric expressions and sentimentalism. But many others are genuinely motivated to live in our homeland.

The civil war has also increased the resolve of some to fight for Armenian self-determination in their homeland. For one thing, it has impoverished Lebanese-Armenian workers, including the large proportion of skilled workers and craftsmen. At the same time, the war has driven some members of intermediate classes into the ranks of the Lebanese working class, while constantly imposing hardships on members of the petty bourgeoisie, especially the large number of small shop owners. In addition to the loss of life, property has been heavily damaged in the shellings; shops have been looted, and inventories have been lost. Armenians in Lebanon are subjected to arbitrary taxes, physical harassment and mounting pressures to conform to non-Armenian socio-cultural standards. Aside from a handful of profiteers who specialize in fishing in troubled waters, the community is immersed in a widespread sense of helplessness. This malaise is further aggravated by the fact that the decimation of the community has only accelerated since deepening economic crisis swept over Lebanon, beginning in 1984. And, on top of everything else, the prospects for peace are dim for the foreseeable future. For all of these reasons, Armenian workers and some petty-bourgeois elements in Lebanon can be considered highly motivated to integrate themselves into the vanguard in Turkey and Iran.

The organization of this community, however, cannot be done in direct relation to the struggle in Turkey. Rather, there is a need to organize a local progressive force which is politically and ideologically close to the vanguard, but which remains independent in its actions. In other words, there is a need to establish a local "vanguard" organization whose principal duty will be to organize the community in defense of its own interests locally. Here the "vanguard" nature of the movement will have a local character, simply because Lebanon's geographic position makes direct inclusion within the patriotic liberation struggle impossible. Lebanon can and should serve as a very important logistical and political base; nevertheless, those highly motivated patriots who wish to participate more directly in the struggle will be obliged to move to the center of activities, in Turkey and Iran. The vanguard organization based in Turkey and Iran may have a representative presence in Lebanon, but it must be primarily up to the local progressive movement to mobilize all possible community potential and to defend the lives and local interests of the community.



### Armenians in Syria

The Armenian community in Syria numbers some eighty to ninety thousand members. Like Armenians in Iran and Lebanon, members of this community remain attached to their cultural heritage. Patriotic feeling is widespread. For these and other reasons, Armenian workers, skilled workers and small farmers, as well as some patriotic petty-bourgeois elements could all be mobilized to join the ranks of the vanguard in Turkey and Iran. As a whole, Syrian-Armenians are subjectively attached to the Armenian homeland and most have objective reasons to struggle for that homeland.

As in Lebanon, a local progressive movement responsible for the mobilization of the community in defense of its own local interests should be the main force in Syria. This movement should be closely associated with the vanguard: it should encourage highly motivated elements to join the vanguard, and it should organize material and political support for the struggle in Turkey.

### Armenians in Iraq

The Iraqi-Armenian community is no longer very numerous. This fact has had repercussions on the quality of the community's cultural life. Nevertheless, there is a general adherence to Armenian culture among Iraqi-Armenians. Coupled with the objective interests of workers and members of other subaltern classes, their cultural orientation may indicate a potential for further recruitment by the vanguard. Again, a local movement should be organized to mobilize all forms of support possible.

## ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE DIASPORA

The majority of diasporan Armenians now reside in countries outside the vicinity of Turkey: in western Europe, North and South America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia. The largest numbers of diasporan Armenians are in the U.S.A. (where there are some 700,000 "ethnic" Armenians) and France (where there are some 300,000 of the same). Although we do not have the space to treat each of these diasporan communities separately, we will have to undertake a close scrutiny of each of them in the near future.

In spite of their obvious differences, these communities in the "West" share a number of characteristics which make some cautious generalizations valid: Generally speaking, they have more difficulty maintaining an active cultural life and are more open to rapid assimilation. This is true even though some of them have lately been experiencing a cultural and patriotic revival. It may be that this revival is in part a result of the past ten years of armed propaganda, as well as the activities of progressive political currents

represented by the Armenian National Movement (M.N.A.) in France,<sup>4</sup> the *Kaytzer* group in Britain, the *Zeitun* group in Italy, the former *Azad Hay* group in Canada and the *Sardarabad* group in the United States. Over the years, these groups have striven to mobilize members of their respective communities in support of our struggle, and hence against assimilation.

It should be noted, however, that the revival, in large part, is also the "synthetic" result of large-scale emigration over the course of several decades, emigration which has depleted older communities in Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, Syria and even Soviet Armenia. It is often forgotten that what the emigrants have added to the diaspora in the "West" they have subtracted from communities in the Middle East which are of far greater strategic value in relation to our patriotic liberation struggle. (This, of course, is not to say that the patriotic revival of recent years has not generated some new interest in resolving the problems we face. Now many patriots await the next step in the development of our struggle to clarify the extent of their personal participation.)

Meanwhile, cultural assimilation (which I have discussed elsewhere)<sup>5</sup> is gradually turning Armenians of the diaspora\* into non-Armenians of Armenian ancestry.\* Thus, in the "West" we see most clearly that there are two mutually opposing tendencies in the diaspora: the patriotic tendency which has led to the establishment of local progressive movements, and the much stronger, more ascendent tendency toward assimilation.

A large proportion of the Armenians in the diaspora are integrated into local petty bourgeoisies. Many others are workers whose sufficient wages and social surroundings have instilled within them a characteristically petty-bourgeois mentality. Unlike petty-bourgeois elements in Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Syria, it is quite improbable that significant numbers of petty-bourgeois people of Armenian background in the "West" will ever choose to leave their localities to integrate themselves directly into the struggle of the vanguard in Turkey and Iran. Their economic interests and social integration in most cases far outweigh whatever emotional attachment to our homeland they may have.

Although none but a handful of these people are ever likely to place themselves on the front line of the struggle, they can and should be a source of support for the vanguard. Despite the fact that most will never leave their homes, businesses or families, the fact remains that many of them sympathize strongly with their struggling compatriots. This sympathy can be expected to become stronger as the vanguard develops an active presence in Turkey. It is the task of local progressive movements, in coordination with the vanguard, to mobilize and politicize this sympathy, channeling material, logistical, political and moral support to the vanguard. The value of such support should not be underestimated. Without it, the task of the vanguard



will be much more difficult and agonizing.

At this point, however, we must exercise caution. The vanguard should guide the struggle. It should never compromise its political and ideological independence to less committed supporters, no matter how much material assistance the latter may rally. In no case should distant, less motivated supporters be allowed to dictate decisions to those directly engaged in the struggle. The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois class orientation of people in the former category, their lack of commitment, their political inexperience and their sheer distance from the actual center of activity—all of these factors deny them the clear perspective necessary to lead a fighting revolutionary organization.

Let us return to our survey of the extended diaspora. It should not be forgotten that the diaspora in the "West" also includes some highly motivated patriots. Among these, we may count workers, unemployed youths and politicized students. Armenian workers and the unemployed—especially those most vulnerable to recessions and mass layoffs—are faced with two intelligent alternatives to solve their economic problems: either they may integrate themselves into local workers' and socialist movements, or they may participate in the Armenian patriotic liberation struggle (or they may choose to do both).

Today, economically exploited Armenians tend to opt for the first choice. This, however, may be due in large part to the fact that there does not yet exist an institutional structure capable of attracting these people and integrating them into the patriotic liberation movement. Until our movement matures to the point where this sort of structure is fully functional, many potentially committed patriots will opt to fight for their local interests within the framework of non-Armenian organizations.

This points up another challenge: *In the diaspora we have certain interests and rights which we must defend, and one of these is the right to organize ourselves in support of our struggle.* The political movements which defend these rights are our natural allies on the local level. It is the duty of progressive Armenian movements to organize Armenians in such movements, so as to defend our local interests. Armenians cannot continue isolating themselves from local struggles that are in their interests, while vainly hoping for a quick end to the diaspora. We should view work around local issues as an opportunity to further organize and politicize progressive elements and to introduce our national struggle to non-Armenian progressive movements. By adapting Armenian movements to local struggles, the most motivated members of the community may be identified and inducted into the ranks of the patriotic liberation movement, and the most militant of these may in turn be integrated into the struggle on the ground, once the situation in Turkey and Iran permits.

A progressive movement should be organized in each country with an Armenian community. These movements should act as local "vanguards," defending local interests, while contributing to the long-term goal of the patriotic liberation struggle. They should politicize their communities, mobilize all human, material and political support possible, and establish relations of practical solidarity with non-Armenian movements. (If we recall the scale of assistance provided to the peoples of Vietnam, El Salvador and South Africa by progressive forces in imperialist countries, we will quickly come to appreciate the importance of gaining support from non-Armenians of good will.)

But how should these local movements in the diaspora be linked to each other, and how should they be linked to the vanguard in Turkey and Iran?

In view of the disparate conditions existing in the various communities of the diaspora, and in view of their geographical isolation from each other, each local movement should conduct its daily affairs on a largely independent basis. A movement based in Australia and made up of Armenians living in Australia, for example, is in the best position to accurately assess the situation there and operate accordingly. For this reason, no movement outside Australia should have an overriding voice in its local decisions. At the same time, of course, the various local movements should cooperate, exchange experiences, engage in political dialog, and even share resources. But all of this should take place within the framework of a rather loose structure. A loose cooperative relationship of this sort would permit flexibility and initiative on the local level, while coordinating efforts on the strategic level for better efficiency.

And again, in view of the variety of conditions obtaining throughout the diaspora, it is natural that local movements will develop according to different rhythms and tempos. Keeping this in mind, certain political differences among the local movements should be tolerated. The most essential point should be each local movement's direct links with the vanguard in Turkey and Iran. Indeed, support for the vanguard should be the *raison d'être* and guiding principle for each local movement. Each one should do its best to adapt to its own surroundings, without compromising this goal. For some, this may mean the near-total adoption of the political line of the vanguard, while for others, at least for a period, this may involve rallying around only the most basic principles.

The vanguard, in cooperation with each local movement, should always aim to maximize efficiency. For example, it might attempt to redirect fund-raising priorities, so that the millions of dollars wasted every year on congressional lobbyists and campaign donations to already-wealthy professional politicians may be rechanneled toward the patriotic liberation struggle.



## SUMMARY

For the sake of clarity, let us recap the points discussed above.

The struggle of the Armenian diaspora involves: (a) preparation for an Armenian revolutionary presence in regions of the Armenian homeland now in Turkey; (b) eventual front-line participation in the revolution there; and (c) the securing of the right of Armenians to live in their homeland.<sup>6</sup>

To prepare for such a struggle, a vanguard in Turkey and Iran must be established. Our compatriots in these two countries are already the most highly motivated to participate directly in the struggle. Moreover, their strategic geographic position makes this possible.

All other communities of the diaspora, whether along the periphery of Turkey or far from the region, should be directed primarily by local progressive movements. These local movements should work to defend the interests of each community, and also mobilize human, material and political support for the vanguard. While cooperating with each other, the local movements should give primary importance to bilateral relations with the vanguard.

*The following letter was addressed to one of Melkonian's comrades, probably in England. Posted from Fresnes Prison, the letter was dated December 2, 1986.*

## FOLLOW-UP TO "ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS"

Dear Friend,

Permit me to expand on my article, "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora." I would like to place this and other articles written in prison in their proper context.

Today, there is much talk about the necessity for dialog on the national question. If this advice is always well-taken, it is especially salutary and necessary for us at this particular moment in history. To date, many interesting things have been written about our past experiences, about the application of political theory to the Armenian struggle, possible avenues for the future, and so on. Nearly all of this writing has been conducive to the evolution of our thinking; nevertheless, we have not yet really sat down to study our situation in the kind of detail that is called for. Without a good command of relevant *facts*, our analyses can get no further than general essays which may or may not be leading us in the right direction.

Our situation is extremely complex, and our task is made even more difficult since, in view of our geographical dispersion in diaspora, it is practically impossible for one person or group alone to accomplish it. So if a theoretical elaboration of the current situation of the Armenian nation\* is to be successfully undertaken, it must be broached on more than one level, and approached in a genuinely collective manner. We need to collate detailed accounts of each diasporan community and of Soviet Armenia; we need to study in detail the relationship between the Soviet Socialist Republic and the diaspora; we need to seriously research the foreign policy of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis Turkey; we need to educate ourselves in depth about the situation in Turkey and all parts of the Kurdish homeland\*; and we need to integrate this research into larger regional analyses. Each of these areas of research, moreover, must be developed along rigorously materialist lines, both diachronically and synchronically.

Unfortunately, my "Organizational Questions" article fell far short of these requirements. Toward the beginning of that article, I warned that what was to follow should only be considered the most general and tentative outline for future development. I would like to reemphasize this. When I wrote that article, I did not have access to the kind of detailed information necessary to speak definitively on the subject. I did not, for example, have accurate statistics on hand as to the percentage of the Armenian community



in Turkey which is working class, peasant, artisan or big bourgeois, and I lacked detailed and reliable data about the class composition of other communities, too. I am acquainted with several key diasporan communities; I have studied these communities as best I could under the circumstances, and over the course of several years I have attempted to assess the potential value of each community to our struggle. So I am reasonably confident of my proposals, in their broad outline. Nevertheless, much more study is necessary, before coming to firmer and more detailed conclusions.

Before my most recent arrest, a number of us had just begun the sort of systematic and serious study we need. I drew up an outline of subjects to be researched, and we solicited corrections and additions. We then apportioned the work and began compiling bibliographies. Although this research was interrupted by my arrest by the D.S.T., I hoped to carry it through in prison. However, prison conditions and restrictions on reading materials are so limited<sup>7</sup> that I can do little more than what I have wished to avoid, namely, continue writing rather abstract analyses.

What I write from prison is mostly a synopsis of what I am convinced is *generally* true. I wish to share these observations, because I believe that people outside should *build upon* the lessons of others. As cursory as my remarks have been, I believe they have been accurate. Left as they are, however, these observations are terribly inadequate. I have written about particular diasporan communities because we cannot get very far in a consideration of our national question without discussing the diaspora. We will not really be qualified to discuss the diaspora, however, until we have analyzed each key diasporan community in detail. All of this is difficult and time-consuming, of course, but it is high time we set out to do it. With this (self-) admonition in mind, I would like to take up some questions you raised in response to the "Organizational Questions" article.

You object to my view that less motivated supporters of the struggle should not be allowed to influence the political decisions of those involved directly in the struggle. This advice, you say, sounds no different from the past unilateral and dictatorial relationship between ASALA and the Popular Movements, the latter of which were expected to automatically and unquestioningly carry out any directive coming down from the top. To advocate my position, you say, shows that "nothing has been learned from the experiences of the last three to four years."

Sadly, the experiences endured by the Popular Movements during the dictatorship of ASALA boss "Hagop Hagopian" have led many comrades to a blanket condemnation of any and all calls for the formation of a vanguard organization. This antipathy is understandable from those who never got to know the true situation within ASALA; nevertheless, it is misdirected. By equating the idea of a vanguard in general with a group

dominated by one apolitical megalomaniac, you risk overlooking a crucial point: An Armenian vanguard force, a force with a clear political line and a hard core of committed cadres, is indispensable because of the *geographical context* of our struggle.

Before discussing this last point, however, a few words should be said about the danger of abuse of power by the leadership of the vanguard. I will not go into details here, since the case of ASALA has been discussed at length in *ASALA: The Reality*.<sup>8</sup> These sources should give you a rough picture of the internal situation within ASALA. If there is any one conclusion to be drawn from the case of "Hagopian's" leadership, it is that ASALA *never was a vanguard organization*, by any stretch of the imagination. And it was prevented from ever fulfilling that role largely because "Hagopian" stubbornly resisted the slightest advocacy of *democratic* centralism.

It may be objected, however, that there has been much abuse of power within other groups which were genuine vanguard organizations. Much could and should be said relative to this point, but let me restrict myself to the following remarks:

There are sincere, honest patriots who will *never* repeat the arbitrary, elitist and brutal policies of "Hagopian." Many of us have learned through bitter experience that there are no shortcuts to building a fighting organization capable of waging and ultimately winning a protracted liberation struggle. This task requires more than merely including provisions within the Organizational Rules, although this of course is necessary. There must be mechanisms guaranteeing accountability, limited terms of office and provisions for immediate recall, disciplinary procedures, and mechanisms for constructive criticism, oversight and redress of grievances. Moreover, the only way these mechanisms should be officially sanctioned is by being discussed, formulated and accepted by democratic vote, and by being institutionalized as part of the basic structure of the organization.

But the experience of revolutionary organizations and political parties, both Armenian and non-Armenian, has demonstrated that these provisions alone still are not enough. Part of the job of building an organization which can actually fulfill a vanguard role is to *create ourselves as new, revolutionary subjects*, practicing what might be called, for lack of a better term, a *democratic culture*. Beyond the Organizational Rules and procedures, and underlying them, the cadres and the rank-and-file must collectively instill within themselves a deep and abiding commitment to collective decision-making and *legality*.

All of this may sound hollow, if it is taken in a superficially moralistic way. Practicing a democratic culture, however, is not simply something we may elect to do if, in addition to being "revolutionary," we also wish to be "democratic." The presence or absence within an organization of a



democratic culture and style of work has in fact distinguished many victorious workers' organizations and liberation movements from others which have floundered or been defeated. Indeed, the most tyrannical usurpers of popular power in this century have had to squelch the nascent egalitarian and democratic culture of the revolutionary movements they have attempted to dominate, and they have had to violate the party rules of erstwhile revolutionary organizations. Sometimes they have temporarily succeeded in dominating these organizations—but at great cost and in the face of determined democratic opposition. At other times they have been defeated by popular forces, both inside the party and outside it.

Our job is to ensure that popular, democratic values are adhered to so tenaciously and are held in such high esteem that the democratic structure of the organization—and by extension the very continuity of the organization itself—is defended by every single one of its members, from the bottom up. This is essentially an *ideological* task. And since it is in our interest to consistently propagate the truth, this and every other ideological responsibility we have toward our people is essentially a task of *education*. Furthermore, since an organization which is democratic can earn its status as a vanguard organization only through the consent and participation of a large constituency, the task of creating a new democratic culture is essentially a task of *self-education*.

Let no one minimize the difficulty of this enterprise, especially for a people who have for centuries been subjected to the rule of sultans, beys and czars. The reverse side of the exaggerated individualism so evident among some Armenians is our readiness to conform unthinkingly to authority. At the same time, however, no one should minimize the importance of this task. What this means in practical terms is that we should take very seriously the educational function of the organization and of each and every one of its members, as what Antonio Gramsci called "organic intellectuals."

You are concerned about the channels for criticism of indefensible actions like the Orly bombing.<sup>9</sup> We have discussed the Orly bombing in *ASALA: The Reality*. It will suffice to note that if the sort of organizational structure advocated here were in place prior to July 15, 1983, that bombing never would have taken place. Nor would the suicide attacks at Ankara Airport or the Istanbul Bazaar have taken place.<sup>10</sup> Some of us risked our lives opposing these operations—and two valiant comrades *lost* their lives in the process—simply because within ASALA there were no channels for discussion, accountability, or collective leadership of the sort advocated here.<sup>11</sup> So, far from suggesting a repetition of the mistakes of the past, the type of vanguard organization I have described strikes me as the only realistic way to draw together the currently diffuse progressive groupings in diaspora within the framework of struggle for our national rights in our homeland.

Of course, the formation of a vanguard party along these lines does not guarantee that mistakes will not occur. During the course of a long, hard struggle there will be mistakes. However, I believe that the best guarantee against repeating the worst mistakes would be to practice criticism and self-criticism within the context of a democratic organizational structure of the sort I've proposed. (To gain an idea of our approach to criticism and self-criticism, I refer you again to *A Critique of Armenian Armed Action, from the Early 1970s through 1983*.)

A word of clarification regarding my position that the less motivated supporters of the vanguard should not directly determine the vanguard's policies and political line: This position should not be taken to imply that the vanguard should ignore or automatically dismiss any and all suggestions from the local movements in the diaspora. The latter most certainly *should* criticize the actions and policies they consider to be incorrect. Criticism from supporters in the diaspora could be valuable for gaining a different perspective on policies. Vehicles for such criticism could be direct dialog with the vanguard, or constructive criticism in publications of the local movements. These criticisms should be discussed by the membership of the vanguard, and if there is enough support within the membership for a referendum on the policy or action in question, then so be it. In this way, the local movements could exercise indirect influence on the vanguard's policy, provided their criticisms are well-founded and their suggestions are sound.

As an ASALA "insider," I should also comment on your statement with reference to strained relations between ASALA and the Popular Movements, that "... there remained misunderstandings on both sides regarding the other." In reality, the misunderstandings occurred only on the part of the Popular Movements (i.e., the local movements). "Hagopian" cynically misled the Popular Movements, abused their trust and tried to make them his puppets. Meanwhile, the sincere patriots within ASALA had no misunderstandings, either. We saw what was going on, and we understood that the true problem was *within* ASALA. We intended to eradicate the source of that problem, in order to solve many other problems, including relations with the Popular Movements. It was terribly unfortunate, however, that we failed to move in a speedy and definitive fashion. For this reason, we ourselves are largely to blame for the paranoia you may have developed.

Nonetheless, I assure you that this paranoia is unwarranted. My impression is that the vanguard would not be able to dictate policy to the local movements, even if it wanted to—and there is near-unanimous agreement that it should not attempt to do so. As I noted in my article on organizational questions, it is clear by now that local progressive movements should enjoy much greater independence from the vanguard, especially with



regard to their own local affairs. The reasons for this are not far to see: For one thing, seven decades of diaspora have resulted in diasporan communities which are markedly heterogeneous. It should therefore be expected that the local movements will be in the best position to know and defend our communities' local interests, cooperate with each other in various domains, maintain healthy relations with Soviet Armenia and mobilize support for our struggle. Moreover, direct control of the far-flung local movements by the vanguard could not help but be dangerous, haphazard at best, cumbersome and pointless.

The vanguard will need much support from the local progressive movements, particularly when it is engaged in the struggle in Turkey. This will require close cooperation between the vanguard and the local progressive movements. If the movements themselves define their *raison d'être* as the struggle for Armenian national rights within those parts of our homeland now in Turkey, then they can be expected to support a vanguard which is geographically situated to carry out that struggle. Such support might include training patriots who request to transfer from the local movements to join the fighting vanguard in Turkey. The stronger the fighting vanguard becomes, the more the local movements will be able to justify their existence and strengthen themselves. At the same time, the more the local movements expand, the more support they will be able to provide to the struggle.

Over the course of the past few years of armed propaganda, more and more of our less motivated compatriots began to support the struggle in a variety of ways, including participation in demonstrations, provision of material and logistical support, agitation and propaganda, legal support of political prisoners, progressive cultural work, etc. Today, armed propaganda in the diaspora no longer has the dynamic effect it used to have. People are waiting for a more advanced step in the struggle. In these "hard times," it is to be expected that our less motivated compatriots will not continue to attend the meetings of local progressive movements, while the bulk of the work once again falls on the shoulders of a few dedicated comrades. With the evolution of the real armed struggle in Turkey, however, the present void left by the cessation of armed propaganda will be more than filled. The work of the fighting vanguard, which is necessary to achieve our national rights, is at the same time the means to generate support for this work.

Now I would like to return to the question of the geographical context of the vanguard's struggle. As you know, *there is no vanguard without practical application of the political line at the point of confrontation with the enemy*. Our focal enemy is the present Turkish state, and in particular its repressive military and bureaucratic apparatus. The front line of confrontation with this enemy can only be located within the borders of the Turkish state itself. It would stand to reason, then, that the practical

application of a political line calling for an Armenian struggle against this enemy can only be carried out by a force—a vanguard force—present in the region. And this means that the fighting vanguard must establish a presence in Turkey, and in the part of Iran which borders our historic homeland. Accordingly, forces outside that region simply cannot play a vanguard role.

We must understand and accept the implications of this fact. When you speak of nothing having been learned from the experiences of the last three or four years, I would have to respond that it is exactly these experiences, the experiences of the past *eleven* years or so, that have taught us that (a) the diaspora is not homogeneous; (b) our struggle will never get very far at all without a military presence on the ground in Turkey; (c) this presence must take the form of a fighting vanguard, and (d) the vanguard should not attempt to dictate decisions to supporters in the diaspora.

Evidently, you yourself have taken these lessons to heart, judging from your observation that: "Often, we have heard the argument that there must be no separation between the military and political aspects of a revolutionary organization. This would be true, too, of the Armenian case if it involved a local population on a given territory struggling for liberation. But this is not the Armenian case." In fact, there must be no separation between political and military domains within the vanguard in Turkey and Iran. Outside of that region, on the other hand, the local progressive movements will generally not have military dimensions (except in special cases such as Lebanon, where the defense of the Armenian community largely depends on the existence of its own militia).

Because of their geographical distance from the battleground, the local progressive movements in diaspora quite literally will not be in a position to make decisions for the vanguard. There are any of a number of insurmountable objections to such an arrangement. To mention just one, their information about developments on the ground cannot help but be drawn from slow, inadequate, sporadic and compromised sources. This one example should be enough to indicate that, by allowing members of distant diasporan movements to directly determine policy, we would unilaterally handicap our fighters on the ground.

I repeat: The vanguard should solicit the opinions and counsel of the local movements. Furthermore, the most committed comrades throughout the diaspora should be encouraged to relocate to the region of direct military struggle, to join the vanguard there. However, final decisions must be left to those directly involved on the ground.

A few words about police repression of the popular movements: First of all, the pretexts for such repression can be expected to diminish somewhat, as we focus on armed struggle within the borders of Turkey. In addition, the independence of the vanguard from local movements will make police



repression outside of the region rather inconsequential for our struggle. There are just too many Armenian communities in too many countries for police repression in any one country to effectively cut support. The vanguard will not provoke such repression directly; nevertheless, we can be sure that police surveillance, arrests and harassment will continue in countries with governments opposed to a revolution in Turkey. Each local movement will have to cope with this.

On the subject of the secrecy of a military force in Iran and Turkey, yes of course it must remain secret, especially now. In time, however, this can and will change. In view of present political conditions, our relatively large revolutionary potential in Iran remains very limited in its actions. This, however, could rapidly change, depending on future developments in that country. Between 1979 and 1982, we experienced a dynamic expansion of our influence in Iran. This expansion could be repeated, surpassed and consolidated in the future, depending on a number of eventualities (some of which are out of our hands).

Here we encounter another "fact of life": Our struggle is very much connected to political developments peripheral to Turkey. Nevertheless, the alternative to participating in the struggle in Turkey is the discredited policy of pinning all hopes on some sort of benevolent international "solution" to our problem. And this is no alternative at all. To prepare the ground for a fighting force, we must organize in Turkey and Iran. You ask if we can "... honestly expect Armenians from Istanbul to organize a vanguard force given the present state of Turkey?" To this I would have to answer that certain Armenians in Turkey have already joined Turkish revolutionary organizations (some of them were even founding members), in an effort to solve the problems with which they are confronted. By approaching motivated Armenians from Turkey and organizing them in coordination with our compatriots from Iran, and in unison with stepped-up efforts to improve relations with Turkish and Kurdish organizations—by doing all this, I think we can honestly expect at least to begin the long process of preparing our vanguard in Turkey.

Toward the end of this letter, I will have a few words to say about the related issue of a military presence in Turkey. Before that, however, I will try to address some further questions you raised.

You wish to have the proposed relationship between the vanguard and the local "popular movements" further clarified. Unfortunately I cannot go beyond what I have already outlined, because it is simply too early to be able to tell. This is something that will become clear as we develop. What I can say now is that there will never be any universal clear-cut formula for relations. They will inevitably depend on the nature of each diasporan community and on the political maturity of each progressive movement. For

example, the vanguard organization will probably have a special relationship in Lebanon, and perhaps also in Syria, because of the importance of these communities vis-a-vis our armed struggle in Turkey.

By way of negative example, I will mention (with some apprehension) a couple of anti-imperialist support groups which, though involved in venerable work, are not very relevant as models for us. I have in mind NorAid and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (C.I.S.P.E.S.) in North America. Both of these organizations mobilize material, political and moral aid for just struggles. Our local movements, however, should do more than this. For example, they should be more closely tied to our struggle and to the vanguard (while maintaining their relative autonomy), and they should protect the interests of each community locally. In these and other respects, they should have a greater variety of institutional functions and broader responsibilities than the solidarity movements with which I am familiar.

You express the need "first to strengthen our local structures and resources before we talk about any linkage to some abstract vanguard force." I do not really agree with this approach. In my opinion, the vanguard should not wait for support movements to organize themselves, nor should local movements wait for a directive from the vanguard to organize. Everyone should do her best where she is now. We should not wait for other people to take initiatives for us, but in general we should give priority to the construction of the vanguard force.

Today—right now—the vanguard force in embryo needs aid in the following two domains: (1) Contributions to the research necessary to put together our political manifesto (this would be a text which would present our outlook and political line in a clear, complete, definitive form); and (2) Financial aid.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the first of these two domains of assistance. The preparation of a satisfactory manifesto is a big task which is crucial for the future. I believe that we need more than just "initial discussions regarding a political program," as you put it. We need in-depth research on all aspects of our struggle, and a clear, scientifically rigorous synthesis of the results of this research. That, of course, includes all subjects concerning Turkey, as you mentioned.

As you pointed out, "greater cultural expression along militant lines" is very important in the diaspora. One of the tasks of the local movements is to develop community life in the domain of culture. The manner in which this is undertaken should be expected to vary from community to community. In the United States and Canada, for example, cultural events may have to take place mostly in non-Armenian languages. This is no big deal. We have to start where we are. All forms of cultural expression ought to be



encouraged. Even a seemingly apolitical poem, song or videotape can sometimes have a powerful politicizing effect. The important thing is to cultivate an audience and get people involved.

With reference to our goals, you wrote: "The right to return, Yes! But to demand more than that at this time can only fuel the nationalistic flames of both Armenians and Turks." On this point, "The Question of Strategy," rudimentary though it is, might be pertinent and suggestive.<sup>12</sup> I would only add here that perhaps we should worry less about fueling nationalistic flames and more about objectively assessing our situation.

I for one agree wholeheartedly with your suggestion that less emphasis be placed on personalities and more emphasis be put on political principles.

Before closing, I should at least acknowledge another point you brought up. You would like to get an idea of how an Armenian force can struggle in northeastern Turkey, when there is no Armenian population there at present. This is certainly a serious and difficult question, and it is a question to which it should frankly be admitted no one can as yet provide a satisfactory answer. It should go without saying that it is much too premature to predict the size and disposition of such a force, nor can the steps necessary to establish a fighting force on the ground be set out with any certainty beyond a few general ideas. It might be possible, nevertheless, to indicate possibilities, on the basis of lessons drawn from several sources<sup>13</sup>:

(1) In the first phases of the armed struggle, Armenian participation will be minimal, and may possibly be limited to forces composed of mixed Armenian and local non-Armenian militants. The relatively small number of Armenian militants may be infiltrated into the area in any of a number of ways, and logistical support may be provided through the same channels;

(2) Seasonal guerrilla activity will be mounted until it is possible to establish a permanent armed presence;

(3) The first predominantly Armenian task forces will be introduced, to specialize in surgical "disarticulation" tactics;

(4) Working relationships will be established and expanded with as many military organizations on the ground as possible. These relationships would not preclude membership within the framework of a Revolutionary Front organization;

(5) If need be, the concentration of forces and the launching of military activities will be withheld until the overall balance of forces

in certain areas of special strategic importance allows us to establish a presence there;

(6) Initially, our field of action will be limited to a small geographic area;

(7) It will be understood that our vanguard organization will be Armenian in the sense of *Haigagan*, rather than in the sense of *Hai*: we should be Armenian in the sense pertaining to the Armenian homeland or people.\* This means that we should accept as members not only all Armenians ready to fight on the ground, but also Kurds,\* Turks\* and others who accept our political line;

(8) Our armed activities will be understood to be evidence of an Armenian presence on the ground and of an Armenian contribution toward the larger revolution in Turkey. Our forces will work to facilitate any possible initiative by Soviet Armenia, while at the same time refraining from relying on such a possibility, which may or may not materialize.

Each of these points certainly demands a great deal of expansion, but let us just add a few words with reference to the last two points:

First, we should not forget that we will be struggling for the right of our people to live in our homeland, and that even if we attain this right we will be living side by side with the region's current inhabitants. These inhabitants are oppressed by our common enemy. As a minimum goal, our struggle should aim to establish a popular form of state power in our homeland—a form of state power which will permit all of us to enjoy our democratic, economic, political and national-cultural rights. If we understand this, then it is not difficult to understand that, as a question of principle, our ranks should be open to all who are willing to fight for the liberation of that particular region, within the framework of our political line. It may seem improbable that many non-Armenians will join us, but in principle we must accept those who wish to. Furthermore, any expansion of our ranks may help to ameliorate the "fish in the sea" problem.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, we should realize that the vast majority of our people—at least two-thirds of all Armenians—lives in the Soviet Union, and that Soviet Armenians would be perfectly justified if one day they opted to take one or another sort of initiative in relation to our people's struggle—even if today that prospect seems very unlikely. Any such initiative could very well shift the balance of power at some point in our struggle and open new possibilities for a resolution of the situation.



I personally am not optimistic on this last point. On the other hand, it is very likely that sooner or later NATO forces will be forced out of the area. Furthermore, the possibility of the eventual formation of a Kurdish state also raises the possibility of a readjustment of Turkey's frontier with the U.S.S.R. in general, and Soviet Armenia in particular. There is much more to be said on this subject, but this may not be the place to say it.

Finally, a word about "the support of the masses." Four points should be mentioned here: (1) A section of the diaspora can support the vanguard without itself constituting the vanguard in its totality; (2) The definition of "masses" should be expected to change quantitatively as the struggle develops; (3) We should consider non-Armenians in "Western Armenia" to be part of the "masses" which we should attempt to integrate into our struggle; and (4) The bulk of the Armenian masses live in Soviet Armenia and other parts of the U.S.S.R. We should not be optimistic about our capacity to win over non-Armenians, nor should we exaggerate the possibility of an eventual Soviet Armenian initiative. Nevertheless, at this point, we must leave the door open to both possibilities.

Apologies for the choppiness of the past few pages. Your remarks and questions deserve a more extended treatment than the one you have just read. It would have been better if we could sit down face to face and discuss things. But then neither of us has much choice in these matters . . .

Warmest greetings,  
Monte

*As the following excerpt from a letter of January 10, 1987, indicates, "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora" succeeded in generating much discussion among far-flung correspondents.*

### REPLY TO A CRITIQUE OF "ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS"

Dear Comrade,

Thank you for your letter of December 30. This letter is a response to your critique of my "Organizational Questions" article.

First, a comment on your doubt that many Iranian- and Turkish-Armenians would join a front line struggle in eastern Anatolia. Your assumption that in the past they have not felt compelled to do so is inaccurate. Until 1920, it was precisely these Armenians, together with many from the Russian Empire, who filled the ranks of the *fedaiis*. At that time, they had the option of emigrating, too, and indeed many did. But as long as conditions in the homeland offered some chance for self-defense, most of the people in these communities stood their ground.

True, there has been little activity on the part of Armenians in Turkey and Iran since the genocide. In view of the history of the region from 1920 to the late 1960s and early 70s, however, it is not surprising that few Armenians have started down the road of militant struggle in their homeland. To have done so would have amounted to setting themselves against overwhelmingly powerful enemies, without any hope of support from allies. Conditions in Iran and especially Turkey did not provide many openings for *anyone* to challenge existing regimes, let alone a small minority of Armenians.

However, as soon as conditions in Turkey and Iran changed, Armenians emerged at the front ranks of progressive movements in these countries. During the Kurdish revolts of 1927-30 in the Van and Ararat regions, Armenians participated on different levels, with the clear intention of creating conditions conducive to an Armenian return to the area. Ataturk saw this coming, and he deported thirty thousand survivors of the genocide from the eastern provinces at this time. Armenians also participated in the defense of both the Mahabad Republic and the (Iranian) Azerbaijan Republics in 1945 and 1946. Once again, they did this with the intention of creating conditions more conducive to Armenian national life in the region.

If we turn to the more recent past, starting in 1975, we see a similar tendency. Many politicized Armenians in Turkey have affiliated themselves with one or another Turkish or Kurdish organization. In some cases, Armenian participation in these organizations represented an attempt to



address Armenian cultural and national grievances against the Turkish state. Indeed, Armenians involved in revolutionary Turkish and Kurdish organizations have expressed their convictions that the revolutionary activities of their organizations would contribute to a solution to Armenian grievances. This fact—together with the fact that, at this time, there was no Armenian organization active in Turkey—helps to explain why so many Armenians in Turkey have joined Turkish and Kurdish organizations. The creation of an Armenian movement could result in the recruitment of even more people of this caliber for the struggle.

As for Iran, organized progressive Armenian activity there has developed apace with the general political evolution in Iran. When the Iranian revolution picked up steam in 1978 and 79, progressive Armenian organizations actively involved in the anti-Shah movement explicitly advocated armed struggle in Turkey, too. Unfortunately, conditions in both Turkey and Iran took a turn for the worse from 1980 to 1983, and the door was slammed shut to further pursuit of Armenian national aims.

The absence of armed struggle by Armenians in Turkey today is due to regional conditions which neither Armenians nor our Turkish and Kurdish comrades can control for the time being. In fact, since 1980, and especially since 1982, revolutionary organizations throughout the region have been having a hard time just maintaining their popular bases and surviving underground. Armenian forces must not be expected to miraculously escape this situation and somehow independently embark on a campaign of armed struggle simply to prove that they are in fact motivated. And all of this is to say nothing of our lack of entrenched organizational structures in the region—organizational structures which Armenian patriots must work now to create.

Turning from the past to the future, you say you also doubt whether significant numbers of Iranian- and Turkish-Armenians should ever be expected to integrate themselves into the struggle in eastern Anatolia. Emigration from Turkey, you say, has been the preferred way out of national oppression, and this situation should be expected to remain unchanged.

Yes, there has been much emigration. But I am not sure it has taken place as nonchalantly as you portray it. One reason for this may be that, while emigration may or may not solve economic, social or political problems, it does not solve cultural problems. Currently, cultural repression in Turkey and Iran is severe; nevertheless, it is widely recognized that emigration to the "West" is no way to secure an Armenian cultural life. On the contrary, it is widely known that pressures to assimilate are frequently even greater in the "West." This consideration should not be underestimated. You should understand that many Armenians have an extremely strong attachment to their culture. Indeed, for most Armenians in this region, their cultural

identity is the center of their lives. Recognizing this, it should not come as a surprise that many Turkish- and Iranian-Armenians who have emigrated to the "West" have become active in our struggle, with an eye to returning to their birthplaces when they get a chance. One does not leave the struggle by leaving Turkey or Iran. In fact, under present circumstances, organizational work outside of these two countries is just as necessary for Armenians as it is for our Turkish and Kurdish comrades.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, a great number of emigrants will never return—especially if politicized Armenians do not organize a movement into which our less politicized compatriots can be integrated. Once there is a real possibility to fight for cultural and national rights, however, an alternative to emigration will exist. In such a case, we may expect to see many people opting for this alternative, rather than emigrating.

Once again we have returned to a point which I have mentioned more than once before: Our immediate task is to organize a vanguard organization. Without such a vanguard, significant Armenian participation in the struggle in Turkey will never come about. Even with this, of course, Armenian participation will be on a much smaller scale than Turkish or Kurdish participation (provided Soviet Armenia takes no initiatives). Nevertheless, even minimal Armenian participation is necessary if we are to secure the right of Armenians to live in all parts of our homeland.

You point out that Turkish-Armenians who wish to struggle against the Turkish state always have the option of joining "multinational revolutionary organizations." I don't have the foggiest idea which particular organizations you have in mind here. In any case, I have noted elsewhere that a solution for Armenians could very well be achieved within the framework of a progressive Turkish state. As for Armenian participation in local struggles, of course this would be desirable and natural. But this in no way conflicts with the demands of our own patriotic struggle in present-day Turkey.

I'd like to add a couple of remarks regarding your statement that "in terms of realizable goals to fight for" you are wary of calls for Armenians to wage their own special fight "in addition to" the struggle for socialism in Turkey or national liberation in Kurdistan.

Taking up the question of "realizable goals" first, I would like to ask you whether you consider the reconstitution of an Armenian collective life in those regions of our homeland now in Turkey to be less realizable than a revolution in Iran? None of us are fortune tellers, but I myself could imagine a solution to the Armenian national problem to materialize sooner than a revolution in that country (and perhaps even before a turn for the better in Lebanon). Regardless of which happens first, however, it is important always to keep in mind that Armenians are fiercely attached to their culture



and their homeland. Local victories carry us closer to our own victory and they make life easier for us; however, the problem of Armenian national life and the threat of assimilation remain to be addressed. Even if social and economic problems were solved in, say, Iran, this would not imply that Armenians in that country would—or should—forget about achieving their rights within their own homeland.

Even more serious than that, however, is your “in addition to” clause. The implication is that you believe Armenians should dedicate their work exclusively to local struggles. This in effect would mean limiting one’s Armenian cultural life to *hayababbanum* [Armenian cultural conservatism] and just working for local rights. And this in turn amounts to a rejection of the Armenian struggle. If diasporan Armenians do not organize themselves to struggle for their rights in their homeland in Turkey, who else will do it? How will those rights be guaranteed? I think you have seen my “Definitions” essay.<sup>16</sup> As you will see from that, I suggest that a person is an Armenian by virtue of that person’s attachment to Armenian culture,\* and I emphasize that this cultural attachment implies an attachment to the Armenian homeland. If we limit our struggle to “more realizable goals” in the diaspora, then we will have to ignore the attachment of Armenians to collective life in our homeland.

Furthermore, if we were to limit our view to participation in local struggles, we would in effect lose our *raison d’être*. Armenian participation in the national liberation struggle in Kurdistan, for example, does not require the formation of an Armenian organizational presence there. If we were to fight exclusively for Kurdish national liberation, there would be no reason why Armenian units should not be organized within the framework of a larger Kurdish national liberation force. An example of a similar arrangement immediately springs to mind here: The anti-Nazi Resistance in France was largely organized along national-linguistic lines. Armenians formed separate resistance groups, as did Italians, Spaniards and others. The various national groups cooperated with each other, while frequently working as separate units. This arrangement increased efficiency, and thus served the Resistance well.

This example, however, only underscores the need to establish our own patriotic organizational structures in each diasporan community. To illustrate this with yet another example: In Lebanon, it is unimaginable that the Armenian community could have participated on the political stage without its own political-military organization. Realizing this, even the Lebanese Communist Party organized an Armenian branch. (This branch coordinated Armenian militia activities in Khalil Badaoui, Hajin and Naba’a in 1975 and 1976.) If for no other reason, a separate Armenian force is necessary in Lebanon because absolutely no force among the over two

hundred organizations in that country offers any real solution to the Armenian community’s specific problems. And this has nothing to do with the right-wing isolationist propaganda used to control the community there. There is much more to be said on this point, but it will have to wait for another letter.

There is yet another reason why Armenian structures must be organized in each community. For the sake of getting somewhere in our struggle (that is, the struggle for Armenian self-determination in that part of our homeland currently in Turkey), each diasporan community must be integrated into our efforts in any domain open to it. The character of participation will vary from community to community, but our patriotic liberation struggle should constitute the *raison d’être* of any Armenian movement today. We do not intend to recreate lobbies or adopt *hayababbanum* as a goal. These are dead ends. By definition, an *Armenian* patriotic movement must take as its ultimate goal the reconstitution of Armenian collective cultural life in our homeland. If this goal is not adopted, then our movement will no longer have any meaning as an Armenian movement. It will degenerate into just another self-perpetuating faction which will do nothing for Armenian national rights in our homeland.

By participating in local struggles, Armenians defend their immediate community interests and mobilize progressive members of the community. By participating in local struggles, we can also gain valuable political, organizational and even military experience. The experience of local struggles, then, could parallel and complement the Armenian liberation struggle. Let me add that some non-Armenian progressive forces in the region (including the Cherk Fedaii of Iran and more than one Lebanese and Palestinian resistance movement) agree that Armenian communities should organize themselves within the context of the struggle in Turkey. They welcome such efforts, considering them to be in the best interests of revolutionary movements in the region as a whole.

If a member of our community should choose to participate exclusively in a local struggle, this would imply that that individual has a greater attachment to his country of residence than to the Armenian homeland. This, of course, is not to say that a diasporan Armenian who chooses to join a Turkish or Lebanese revolutionary organization should be put down. Not at all. The point I am trying to make here is just that a diasporan Armenian who is devoted exclusively to a local struggle is not really engaged in that local struggle *as an Armenian*.

You brought up the subject of the Dashnak Party’s propaganda to the effect that Armenians in Lebanon should not take sides in the Lebanese conflict because they have no long-term interests there. I’ll resist digressing into my opinion of what form Armenian participation in the Lebanese



conflict should take. I have space here only to repeat what you already know: The parties which propagate the isolationist line in Lebanon do so in order to secure their own long-term interests in *Lebanon*. The notion of Lebanon as a "halfway station" is simplistic; nevertheless, as Armenian patriots, we must (almost by definition) envisage a change of address. Lebanon and the Lebanese-Armenian community can and should play an important role in our patriotic struggle. This, however, does not mean that we do not have long-term interests in Lebanon. After all, our struggle in Turkey is a long-term struggle. In the meantime, it should be the responsibility of any progressive Armenian movement in Lebanon to protect the lives and interests of Armenians in that country.

So in my opinion, an Armenian movement in Lebanon should do three things. It should: (1) defend the lives, property, social, political and cultural rights of our community; (2) participate in the larger effort to change the political and economic structures of the country, making them more democratic and egalitarian; and (3) integrate itself into our long-term patriotic struggle, in the sense of working to create conditions in Lebanon conducive to greater participation by that community in our patriotic struggle.

Neither the Dashnak party nor ASALA have set themselves these goals, much less attempted to achieve them. Of course, both of them publicly acknowledge the importance of the Lebanese-Armenian community; but neither has succeeded in the (admittedly very difficult) task of moving to secure the long-term interests of our community there. (Sadly, at this late stage of the civil war it may be all but impossible to do much more than damage control.) Furthermore, regarding the goal of mounting a struggle against the Turkish state, their activities have been almost entirely limited to lip service, each one trying to outdo the other by repeating the same old wearisome nationalistic themes.

I hope these remarks give you an idea why I believe that objective conditions compel some Armenians to fight for an end to the diaspora. Of course, this point needs to be greatly elaborated and fleshed out with concrete examples and details. Nevertheless, I think it is essentially correct.

Later, you write that the same conditions which could be seen as compelling some Armenians to fight could also be interpreted as compelling them to extend the diaspora still further. Your remark here brings up an important point. If one isolates cultural conditions from economic, social and political conditions, then one may very well come to your conclusion. However, the fact is that many diasporan Armenians are culturally attached to their homeland, and would prefer to exercise their social, economic and political rights there, rather than sacrificing the former for the latter. Because it is becoming increasingly clear that emigration does not guarantee a

solution to social and economic problems, you should not assume that the conditions to which you refer will always compel Armenians to emigrate. In fact, increasing numbers of Armenians have come to realize that emigration only aggravates these problems, and, as a result, many have refused to emigrate. In fact, relatively few Turkish- and Iranian-Armenians have emigrated to the "West" recently, and evidently they do not want to—despite the poor conditions under which they are living in these countries.<sup>17</sup>

Further on, you claimed that the reason Armenians would opt to fight in "Western Armenia" might turn out to have more to do with individual moral or ideological convictions than with an attempt to solve problems they encounter in their daily lives. Such volunteerism may indeed apply to compatriots in countries such as the U.S. and France, but it is a misrepresentation of the situation in diasporan communities in other countries. In "Organizational Questions" and elsewhere, I have argued that in their present state of disarray and demobilization, the human resources of the diaspora remain at the "raw materials" stage. Following through with this metaphor, it might help to distinguish between two general kinds of "raw material" in the diaspora: (1) the kind which could eventually be "worked up" to support the struggle in secondary ways, and (2) the kind whose objective conditions and cultural level make them potential recruits for a vanguard force. Clearly, the former category includes the vast bulk of our "raw material."

And then, of course, there will be borderline cases, as well as the "dross," consisting of members of our communities who could not be considered to be "raw material" of any grade. Nevertheless, I believe that the greater part of the diaspora falls within these two types of "raw material." Our task, then, is to "work up" this raw material, to mobilize both of these sources of support and coordinate them as closely as possible, in the context of Armenian participation in the struggle in Turkey.

Well, I may have belabored this point. Much more explanation should be provided to make a convincing case for my position, but that will have to wait. Once *serious*, exhaustive research has been compiled and collected between the two covers of a book, we will be able to judge more accurately and with greater confidence what our fighting potential is. At that point, discussion will be more meaningful, or at least based on facts rather than questionable presuppositions. This in turn will allow us to iron things out in a more satisfactory manner.

Your comrade,  
Monte



*Although it was posted from Poissy Prison on October 26, 1987, the original version of this list of seven principles was dated August 1, 1987. Evidently, these few tentative points of a "mass line" were part of a collective effort to outline a larger document, perhaps the manifesto of the projected Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement (A.P.L.M.).*

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES (An Incomplete Rough Draft)

The principles of scientific socialism inform our political program and guide our political practice. In addition to the points taken up specifically in other parts of our political manifesto, our adherence to socialist ideology entails acceptance of the following general principles:

#### (1) Internationalism

The present era is marked by imperialist domination and the gradual emergence of socialist forces. In this context—and in view of the global character of markets and the development of the means of production, distribution and exchange, as well as transportation and communications media—all peoples and nations are either directly or indirectly interrelated. In the same way, the future of each people and each nation is connected to the future of all others. The leaders of imperialist countries recognize this, and they close ranks to oppose national liberation movements as a bloc. In response to imperialist "internationalism," we must foster ever greater revolutionary internationalism.

Accordingly, we consider an internationalist view of global, regional, national and local questions to be indispensable. This view is based on equal respect for all nations and peoples, as well as the necessity for cooperation among progressive forces. We view the current situation of the Armenian people in an internationalist context, and we orient our practical work in this light.

#### (2) Democracy

All peoples and nations should have the right to determine their own futures through democratic means. A concomitant of self-determination of nations is democratic decision-making at home. New and ever more representative and participatory forms of democratic decision-making should be sought; however, the fundamental principle should remain that the will of the masses—and in particular, the economically productive masses—must be socially and politically decisive.

The free expression of this will can only be achieved by eliminating exploitation and ameliorating antagonistic class conflict. This is why authentic democracy is *socialist democracy*. We struggle to establish such a democracy in those parts of the Armenian homeland where it does not yet exist, and we express our solidarity with all other peoples and forces who strive to establish similar systems in their own homelands.

#### (3) Socialism

Socialism is a protracted transitional stage between the capitalist and communist modes of production.<sup>18</sup> Socialist systems vary greatly from one case to another, and each case should be expected to undergo change—even radical change. Nevertheless, several generalizations about socialism can be proffered:

Socialism is workers' power; it is state power of the economically productive segment of the population. Assuming some minimal level of development of the productive forces, this definition would hold with or without the existence of markets, and regardless of the specific forms of ownership of the means of production.

With the establishment of a socialist system, able-bodied adult citizens will have both the right and the responsibility to work. Work will be remunerated in relation to productivity, initiative and need, and access to social services will be guaranteed on an equal basis to all. These services would include: health and medical care, housing, education, vacation time, disability support, paid maternity leave and retirement pensions. The greatest diversity of cultural activities will be supported, and the participation of all will be encouraged. The chief guiding principle will be the elimination of man's exploitation of man.

#### (4) Feminism

Women have experienced special forms of oppression at the hands of men, from physical abuse and objectification to systematic exclusion from decision-making capacities. Today, "Third World" women are a source of super-exploitation by imperialist corporations, while at the same time, a feminization of poverty has been taking place in the imperialist countries.

Socialist revolutions have heretofore brought immediate improvements to the lives of women. To date, however, not nearly as much progress has been made in the "socialist" countries as should be expected. It is the duty of socialists to redouble their efforts to eradicate all forms of male privilege and achieve gender equality. In addition, reproductive rights must be respected in practice, by providing readily available high-quality prenatal health care, paid maternity leave and free child care programs.



## (5) Environmentalism

Our planet's ecology is in serious danger. Our atmosphere is threatened, as well as our land and water. Damage to the environment has already resulted in the destruction of many species of plants and animals and has resulted in the degradation of the quality of life for billions of human beings. Workers, women, children and peoples dominated by imperialism are usually the first to suffer the effects of environmental pollution. Degradation of the environment could eventually have an irremediable adverse effect on the whole of the human species.

The most serious nonmilitary threat to the world's ecology is posed by profit-hungry transnational corporations. Imperialist corporations savagely lay waste to natural resources, just as vigorously as they lay waste to human resources.

At the same time, it has become clear that in the nominally socialist countries a much higher priority must be given to protection of our flora and fauna, the conservation of natural resources and habitats and the rehabilitation of damaged ecosystems. A socialist system can and must plan its economy such that industrial and agricultural production will meet the needs of people, while protecting the environment.

## (6) Anti-Imperialism

Imperialism is far and away the main cause of increasing exploitation, oppression and misery in the world today. In one way or another, almost all other reactionary forces are tied into the global imperialist system.

The dominant imperialist country is currently the U.S.A., which is joined by Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Canada and a number of other countries. Although conflicts often arise among these imperialist countries, they quickly close ranks in a common front against democratic, socialist and revolutionary forces which challenge their domination. Because of the global reach of imperialism, freedom-seeking peoples on every continent are confronted by a common enemy. The character and pace of local struggles may vary, but the victory of the anti-imperialist struggle of any people in any part of the world contributes to the final defeat of imperialism, both regionally and globally.

Not only is Turkey a colonial power in the Kurdish homeland,\* but it is also an imperialist client state and a military staging base for NATO. For these reasons, our struggle for national self-determination in those parts of the Armenian homeland within the current borders of the Turkish state is by nature anti-imperialist. The success of our struggle in eastern Anatolia can only come about by destroying the present Turkish state, driving NATO out of the region and establishing a socialist system which serves the interests of all the peoples of that part of our homeland. Imperialist domination of the

region will be brought to an end when local revolutionary forces consolidate political power after their military victory.

The success of our anti-imperialist struggle depends for the most part on the success of revolutionary forces in the region of our homeland—and probably throughout the whole of present-day Turkey. In addition, this struggle will be complemented by our participation in local anti-imperialist movements throughout the diaspora.

## (7) Peace and Disarmament

Not only do war and all forms of military conflict *directly* result in enormous human suffering and material damage, but the arms race wastes precious resources that should be directed to improving the state of human life. From a socialist perspective, these are resources which should be used in the construction of economic infrastructures, agricultural production, health care, education, environmental protection and cultural development. World peace is imperative, then, not only to ameliorate human suffering over the short term, but also to redirect wasted resources for long-term economic, social and cultural progress.

There can be no lasting peace without justice. Today, the imperialist system stands in the way of peace, because it perpetuates injustice. Lasting peace will remain elusive, as long as "lesser developed nations" continue to be subjected to the super-exploitation of transnational corporations and brutal oppression by regimes aligned with imperialism. So under prevailing conditions, "peace" would amount to the unilateral submission of subaltern nations and classes to the unmitigated violence of their exploiters and oppressors. Where there is oppression, resistance should be expected and supported. This is why revolutionary wars are both legitimate and necessary, to create the conditions which will make genuine, lasting peace a reality.

Our revolutionary struggle is but one small part of this long effort toward world peace. It should be recognized, however, that definitive global victory by revolutionary forces is a long way off. Since in the meantime the entire planet is threatened by weapons of irreversible mass destruction, we call for an end to the militarization of space and the elimination of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.



*This discussion, dated February 19, 1988, appeared in Kaytzer, No. 92-3.*

## LONG-TERM ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR THE ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

In "Organizational Questions for the Diaspora," I outlined the immediate and medium-term organizational tasks of the various components of the non-Soviet diaspora. These tasks boil down to the composition of a revolutionary vanguard force based in Turkey and Iran. Composed of Armenians recruited from the most patriotic segment of the diaspora, this vanguard force would draw material and moral support from all other progressive and patriotic Armenians of the diaspora. These organizational tasks are to be accomplished in solidarity with other progressive movements in each diasporan locality, and—most importantly—in coordination with other revolutionary forces in Turkey. Such are the imperatives of our present situation. We must concentrate all our energy on them.

To gain a firmer understanding of the kind of efforts our protracted struggle will demand of us, it would be helpful to review our long-term organizational perspective. But first, for the sake of clarity, we should restate several points:

Our political and organizational tasks concern *Armenian elements of the non-Soviet diaspora* (as well as those few Armenians who still live in regions of our homeland now in Turkey). We aim to make it possible *in practice* for Armenians of the non-Soviet diaspora (including Armenians in all regions of present-day Turkey) to voluntarily resettle in our historic homeland now in Turkey, to enjoy full and equal rights as natives of the region, and to participate freely in Armenian national-cultural life. Our aim, then, is to secure for Armenians of the non-Soviet diaspora a form of national self-determination, as this term has been defined previously.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement aims to liberate Armenians in the diaspora, in the sense that it will fight for the freedom to freely reconstitute a collective Armenian national life in that part of our homeland currently controlled by the Turkish state.

Our tasks as a diasporan force concern *that part of our homeland now in Turkey*.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, we must turn our attention to its present population, which is made up of a Kurdish majority, a large minority of Turks, various other minorities,\* and a few traces of Armenians. The total population consists of between 3.6 and four million people, and it is increasing at an annual rate of about 2.8%. Most of the present inhabitants of eastern Anatolia are subject to capitalist exploitation and brutal political repression by the Turkish state. Sooner or later, the day will very likely come when these people will contest their subjugation by means of revolutionary violence.

It has been noted on numerous occasions that the success of the Armenian patriotic liberation movement depends upon the establishment of a popular democratic socialist regime in our homeland. This in turn can only be achieved by fighting side-by-side with other peoples for revolutionary change in the Kurdish homeland\* and in all parts of present-day Turkey. Thus, our struggle must be part and parcel of a larger revolutionary struggle for socialism in the region.

Of course, at present it is impossible to predict exactly how the revolutionary struggle in the different regions of Turkey (as well as in regions of the Kurdish homeland outside of Turkey) will unfold. It may proceed more or less uniformly, or in fits and starts. To make matters more complicated, the liberation of the present inhabitants and the establishment of socialism may take any of a number of forms. The most likely alternative post-revolutionary arrangements would appear to be the following:

(1) Revolution might lead to the establishment of a socialist regime throughout present-day Turkey, while the affected portion of the Kurdish homeland gains autonomy, pending a referendum on political independence for Kurdistan. Under these circumstances, the Armenian homeland would remain within the borders of a new Turkey, and perhaps be divided between autonomous Kurdish areas and the rest of Turkey. In such a case, we would insist that a program for minority rights be inaugurated, including state aid for the reconstruction of Armenian national life in our homeland.

(2) Revolution might lead to both a socialist Turkey and an independent Kurdish socialist state. In such a case, the Armenian homeland would likely be divided among the two states. Under these circumstances, we would demand programs providing practical guarantees for the reconstruction of Armenian national life in the parts of our homeland contained in both new states.

(3) The participation of the Armenian revolutionary vanguard in a successful revolution, combined with favorable international and regional developments might provide an opening for the Armenian S.S.R. to participate in an eventual initiative for Armenian national self-determination in the region. The resulting arrangement might include reintegrating at least some parts of our homeland into Soviet Armenia. In this eventuality, we would insist that any state or states which control remaining parts of our homeland must draw up and put into effect programs for the reconstruction of Armenian national life for any Armenians who may decide to live there.



Of course, it is also very possible that a revolution might lead to seizure of state power by a force with a deficient understanding of socialism, democratic principles and the national question. In this case, it is likely that the conditions necessary for our minimum goal will not be produced. If no solution to our problem is forthcoming, the form of our struggle may change, but the struggle itself will continue until at least our minimum goal is achieved throughout the entirety of our homeland.

It should go without saying that the three general outcomes listed are not necessarily distinct or separate possibilities. The eventual outcome may be a combination of two or more of these scenarios or a variation on one of them—or perhaps an unforeseen alternative.

Beyond these necessarily general remarks, not much more can be said at this early date without falling into groundless speculation. By the same token, however, to dismiss any one of these alternatives out of hand would also be unwarranted. So, in attempting to address the question of our long-term organizational prospects, it should be recognized that, since our struggle may result in a number of possible outcomes, we should leave open several alternative organizational agendas, depending upon the course of future events.

Whatever the outcome may be, however, we must not lose sight of the principle—or rather the *fact*—that the liberation of our people can only be realized along with the liberation of all other inhabitants of the region. For centuries, our people have lived side-by-side with other peoples in our homeland. In the past, the whole region has been dominated by economic systems based on exploitation. Our homeland has been ravaged by imperial invaders, foreign colonial powers and aggressively chauvinistic regimes. Because of this, many conflicts have arisen among the peoples of the region. Generally speaking, the Armenian people have been dominated by foreign powers, and so Armenians have usually been the victims of intercommunal conflict.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, and in the face of enormous hardships, the Armenian people remained an absolute majority in their homeland, down to the period of the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s, and they remained at least a plurality there until the genocide of 1915.

At the time of the genocide, large numbers of non-Armenians were incited to collaborate in the genocidal designs of their rulers. It is undeniable that many Turks and some Kurds lent passive and active support to atrocities directed against the Armenian people by Abdul Hamid and the Young Turks. However, it is important to remember that, throughout a great part of our history, the various peoples, especially the toiling classes, have lived peacefully together, and were subjected to the same exactions and exploitation by the same rulers and dominant classes. Furthermore, at various moments in history (including the years of the genocide, when civilian

participation in anti-Armenian atrocities was at its peak), at least some non-Armenians in our homeland have taken steps to defend our people and to minimize human losses.

In order to calmly and objectively come to terms with our past, understand our present and prepare for our future, we need to overcome the emotional impediments which massacre and genocide have caused our people. One of these impediments is the feeling that “everyone is against us.” The fact is that even when there was widespread support for anti-Armenian atrocities, the true responsibility for these actions should fall on the regime and the dominating classes who were able to manipulate one group of people or another, in order to carry out their own chauvinistic and genocidal policies. (It might also be remembered that some of the manipulated elements were later to fall victim themselves to the same repression which they had earlier meted out to Armenians. The massacres and deportations of Kurds in 1916 decimated members of the several tribes which had participated in the genocide. Also, many of the Turks who participated in the genocide later fell victim to famine and epidemics, caused at least in part as a side effect of the genocide.)

Although everyone who participated in the genocide must share the blame, primary responsibility for the atrocities lies with the Turkish regime and the ruling classes. What took place was the result of a premeditated and systematic state policy. Indeed, this very fact is what made it a *genocide*, as opposed to a series of sporadic and spontaneous massacres. Those who had a direct hand in the genocide were accomplices in a state policy prosecuted by the Young Turk regime.

Few of these people are still alive today. Nevertheless, the present Republic of Turkey is the beneficiary and continuator of the genocidal “Union and Progress” legacy. Today, the Turkish state continues to deny the Armenian people their national rights in their homeland; it oppresses Armenians still living in Turkey; it systematically destroys the material evidence of our people’s long cultural heritage; it extends its anti-Armenian activities to communities in the diaspora, and it poses a military threat—including a nuclear threat—to our people in Soviet Armenia, and to that part of our homeland. These are among the many good reasons why we advance our claims against Talaat Pasha’s heirs in Ankara today. And it is why we see our problem as a *political* problem which demands a *political* solution, not blind revenge against individuals.

This same regime brutally oppresses all other non-Turkish national elements, impoverishes workers and small peasants, pursues a colonial policy in the Armenian and Kurdish homelands, occupies northern Cyprus, and threatens military expansion along its borders with literally all neighboring states. As terrible as this situation is, it indicates that we have many allies.



It is high time we came to terms with the fact that if we and our allies defeat our common enemy through collective efforts, Armenians must coexist side-by-side with other peoples in a common homeland.

To make sure our enemies never again succeed in pitting one people against another, all revolutionary forces in Turkey must take a firmly internationalist position on the national question. Our Turkish allies, in particular, need to educate the Turkish masses regarding historical truth and the rights of the Armenian people and other peoples. This task will be long and difficult, since it requires surmounting every last vestige of Turkish nationalist chauvinism within the ranks of the revolutionary forces themselves, as well as a tireless campaign against both the flagrant and subtle chauvinist propaganda ploys directed and financed by the Turkish state and allied reactionary circles. It is up to Armenian progressives to aid our Turkish revolutionary comrades in every way, especially by providing them with the theoretical and factual help they need for their re-education efforts. At the same time, we must strive to do away with all the negative, irrational, lingering, psychological effects that the genocide and other atrocities have had on our people. In short, all revolutionary forces concerned with the struggle in Turkey must work to create the subjective understanding necessary for close practical internationalist cooperation in struggle and in our common future.

The fate of all peoples in the region are closely tied together, and our struggles converge. Therefore, it is reasonable and necessary that we unite, coordinate our efforts and pool our resources. In the early period of our struggle, the most appropriate form of cooperation will be interorganizational. After assessing the political line, strategy and practice of other organizations, each organization will determine to what extent and on what levels it can cooperate with each other organization. This sort of cooperation is most appropriate for the early stages of the struggle, when political lines are still in the process of clarification, and when inexperience still poses an obstacle to coordinating efforts over a prolonged period with a wide range of elements. We should bear in mind, however, that the unity of all revolutionary forces should—and eventually must—go beyond the less efficient organization-to-organization cooperation.

The most immediate organizational task of the Armenian revolutionary vanguard is to clarify our political line, while rallying non-Soviet diasporan potential around the revolutionary vanguard, with an eye to building an active force on the ground in Turkey. Since our struggle is for the rights of the Armenian people, as well as for the liberation of the Armenian homeland (i.e., for the rights of all inhabitants of our homeland), we should eventually work to integrate as many revolutionary non-Armenian inhabitants of our homeland as possible directly into our ranks. Of course, no one people should be expected to win the revolution for other peoples. But not to

actively recruit among non-Armenian inhabitants of our homeland would amount to abnegating our internationalist principals. This is the practical organizational implication of the term 'Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement', where "Armenian" (*Haigagan*) means "of or pertaining to the Armenian people and/or homeland."

And here, once again, we are confronted with the need to do serious research. Starting right now, we need to begin hammering out a very clear, detailed and scientific political manifesto that will illuminate the historical context and the present situation of the Armenian people, as well as the histories of the Kurdish and Turkish peoples and other minorities and their respective present situations. It is important that our manifesto address the historical realities and situations of all national groups involved on the regional scene.

Of course, these immediate tasks will be carried to a higher level in the next stage, while at the same time we will be confronted with new challenges. So our medium-term organizational tasks will be to continue to consolidate support from the non-Soviet diaspora, while recruiting as many non-Armenian inhabitants of our homeland as possible directly into our organization.

As we noted earlier, our long-term organizational tasks will have to address a new situation which may assume any of a number of alternative forms. With the approach of victory and, finally, the seizure of state power, many revolutionary movements have transformed themselves into parties which assume state functions. It remains to be seen whether this will happen in our case, and if so, then under what circumstances. In any case, as we have said, this stage is still very far off, and it is practically impossible to predict with any confidence which alternative form the struggle will take. Perhaps the best we can do at this stage is to briefly touch on general responses to these questions.

In the case of the first and second possible outcomes of the revolution (that is, in the case that Soviet Armenia does not take a decisive initiative), we may consider fusing our own organization with other organizations, to form a new political party capable of participating in the construction of a new socialist state. Or, if political differences are still too great, we may opt to retain our organizational independence, and try to push forward correct policies for our homeland and the peoples in it.

In the case of the third possible outcome (in which Soviet Armenia will have taken a decisive initiative which will qualitatively and quantitatively change the whole situation), it would probably be most reasonable to integrate ourselves into the political forces backing the initiative (forces which will probably overshadow us anyway).

I realize that these few sketchy remarks raise many more questions than they answer. Nevertheless, I hope they will cast some light, however dim, on the long road which lies ahead.



actively recruit among non-Armenian inhabitants of our homeland would amount to abnegating our internationalist principals. This is the practical organizational implication of the term 'Armenian Patriotic Liberation Movement', where "Armenian" (*Haigagan*) means "of or pertaining to the Armenian people and/or homeland."

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13. These sources include firsthand experience



## Notes:

1. Dated March 22, 1990, and published in Armenian. No publication information is available. —Ed.
2. This term is listed in the glossary in the last section of Chapter One, above. In this and other chapters, the first time a term appears which is included as a glossary entry it is marked with an asterisk (\*). —Ed.
3. ASALA-Revolutionary Movement, the group which in the summer of 1983 finally split with the faction of ASALA dominated by "Hagop Hagopian." —Ed.
4. The leftist M.N.A. was active in Paris, Marseilles and elsewhere, until its dissolution in the late 1980s. —Ed.
5. Refer to "Assimilation and Alternatives," in Chapter Four, below. —Ed.
6. We have not mentioned the Soviet diaspora, with its 1,100,000 members, because this community's activities are more dependent on an eventual initiative by Soviet Armenia. —MM
7. I can receive no hardback books, no photocopies, no books not sent directly from publishers, and consequently no out-of-print books. Subscriptions to Armenian-language publications have been obstructed; available reading light is poor; research materials have been confiscated; correspondence in and out of prison is subjected to uneven delay and is periodically "lost," etc. All of this, of course, is in addition to the "usual" treatment other political prisoners and I receive: gratuitous restrictions on visitors, inadequate access to fresh air and exercise, unannounced searches and frequent relocations from cell to cell. —MM
8. ASALA-R.M., undated. Distributed in manuscript form by the Kaytzer group in London. This text, together with *A Critique of Armenian Armed Action, from the Early 1970s through 1983* (published by Kaytzer in 1984 in English as a pamphlet) and *A Report on Armenian Armed Actions*, will appear under one cover in a forthcoming Armenian edition to be published in Yerevan. —Ed.
9. See footnote 11, Chapter Two, above. —Ed.
10. See footnote 10, Chapter Two, above. —Ed.
11. Melkonian is referring to an incident which took place on July 15 and 16, 1983, in which two ASALA members, Khatchig Havarian and Vicken Aivazian were killed when latent conflicts flared up within ASALA ranks. Two militants, Garlen Ananian and Aram Vartanian, were later executed by "Hagop Hagopian" for their alleged involvement in the flare-up and their opposition to Hagopian's autocratic one-man rule of the group. As a result of the split in ASALA ranks, ASALA-R.M. was formed. —Ed.
12. Refer to Chapter Two, above. —Ed.



13. These sources include firsthand experience drawn from struggles in Iran and Lebanon, a familiarity with the struggles of Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries, as well as their theories on armed struggle, and the observations and experiences of comrades such as Garlen Ananian. (An Iranian-Armenian, comrade Ananian hiked hundreds of kilometers through southeastern Turkey with local armed revolutionaries. His observations provide an invaluable picture of geographic and demographic conditions along the Turkish border with Iran, Iraq and Syria. Our struggle suffered a great loss when this courageous young militant was killed by "Hagop Hagopian" in August 1983.) —MM
14. A reference to Mao Tsetung's remark that people's fighters should swim within the masses like fish in the sea. —Ed.
15. Nor for that matter should it be assumed that immigrants to Soviet Armenia have left the struggle. On this point, refer to my article, "Why Soviet Armenia Does Not Currently Constitute a Total Response to the Armenian People's National Aspirations." —MM [See Chapter Four, below. —Ed.]
16. This essay appears in Chapter One, above. —Ed.
17. Moreover, as I have stated before, emigration does not necessarily nullify an emigrant's political preferences. Many emigrants remain determined to struggle to return to their homeland. —MM
18. Refer to Monte's discussion of communism in "Reply to a Comrade," in Chapter Two, above. —Ed.
19. Refer to "The Question of Strategy," in Chapter Two, above. —Ed.
20. Refer to the definition of "Armenian Homeland" in the glossary in Chapter One, above. —Ed.
21. Especially for the past one thousand years or so. —MM



*Chapter Four*  
VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE DIASPORA



*Melkonian repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance of organizational cooperation among Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish insurgents. His recognition of the potential regional impact of the Kurdish insurgency dates back at least to 1979, when he and several other young Armenians made a trek of solidarity and cooperation to various parts of Iranian Kurdistan. There they became acquainted with the peshmerga, or Kurdish guerrillas, and met the Kurdish leader Dr. Ghasamlu, as well as the progressive religious leader, Sheikh Oseini.*

*The following agitational piece appeared in ASALA's eclectic "official organ," Hayastan (Nos. 8-9), in May 1981. Although the piece was unsigned, Melkonian has confirmed that he is the author. He was a regular contributor to the ASALA journal, from its first publication in fall 1980, until summer 1983.*

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### NEWROZ: A NEW START

Every year, on March 21, the Kurdish people<sup>1</sup> celebrate. This is one of the most important and ancient of dates on the Kurdish calendar. The Kurds\* call it *Newroz*, or "New Day."

The exact origin of *Newroz* is uncertain, but the tradition is traced back to the fall of the Neo-Assyrian capital, Nineveh, in 612 B.C. For many tribes of the Jazira, the defeat and burning of Nineveh represented the overthrow of a despotic, oppressive regime. This defeat marked a new era for the peoples previously dominated by the Assyrians. Among the peoples to celebrate the new era were the predecessors of the modern Kurdish nation.\*

For over 2500 years *Newroz* has been celebrated by building bonfires which give light through the night, separating winter and spring. The date is festive, with dancing and feasting.

Our main concern, of course, is not ancient history. What concerns Armenian militants is the significance of *Newroz* for our Kurdish comrades today. How has *Newroz* survived as an important festival, and why has it gained so much emphasis in recent years? In answering this question we may learn a lesson which is internationally valid.

The symbolism of *Newroz* is clear: the end of winter and the start of spring; departure from the old and welcoming the new; the end of an oppressive regime and the beginning of a new era. *Newroz*, in short, signifies a new start. This is why *Newroz* has survived, and why it is so very important today. The Kurdish people today are struggling for their national self-determination. They are struggling to cut the feudal bonds of the past and to establish a democratic, socialist and revolutionary Kurdistan.\* They are struggling for



something new, something better than anything that has occurred in the past. Their struggle is for progress, for the future.

This is a simple but powerful lesson which has as much meaning for Armenians\* as for Kurds. The Armenian people\* are also at a stage of leaving behind old ideas and institutions. We are replacing counterproductive ideologies with new approaches to the problems we face. We are taking a step forward, toward a goal which, if achieved, will result in conditions for the Armenian people better than any that have existed for three thousand years. We are not struggling for military domination of land or for an imperialist-controlled "Armenian" regime. We are struggling for the liberation of our homeland from the domination of imperialism.

In this struggle, we are no longer alone. Alongside us are our Kurdish co-patriots, our Turkish comrades and all peoples struggling for their freedom and national rights. It is truly the dawn of a new day, a Newroz. We have the right to celebrate, to be festive. We have started anew.

*This section consists of a short article dated December 22, 1985, and posted from Fresnes Prison. Originally written in Armenian, the English translation is Melkonian's.*

### "ONLY THROUGH UNITY IS THERE STRENGTH!"

This slogan has been bandied about a lot lately, as if there were unanimous agreement as to what it means. In response to the familiar lament "Armenians are never unified!" everyone agrees, of course, that we need to rally our forces and close ranks. So no patriotic Armenian would disparage "unity," in this sense of the word. One gets the impression, however, that "unity" has not always been used in this sense when some conservative orators have invoked the word. It is worth asking, then, what the word means. Once we get a handle on this, we may turn to a couple of further questions: Is "unity" possible today, or even in the distant future? And if so, should it be elevated to the status of a political goal? Or even a short-term tactical goal? Here I will try to address these questions, however briefly.

At the outset, however—and without launching into a long philosophical digression—I should explicitly state a basic principle to which I will appeal below: *Ought* implies *can*. Any goal is harmful which cannot rationally be determined to be realizable in practice.

This said, let us gain a broad historical perspective on the issue of "unity." Today, civil wars, armed resistance, strikes and battles rage on every inhabited continent. Many of these conflicts take place among opposing political or class forces within the same nation or people—Salvadoran oligarchs against Salvadoran workers and peasants; the Filipino standing army against Filipino popular and democratic forces; British capitalists against British workers. Within any social or national formation (or at least within any of them which permit the exploitation of the majority economically productive population), conflict of interest always threatens to spill over into violent political conflict. Accordingly, we can say that, as long as there are opposed economic interests, political objectives and ideological convictions among a "people," complete national unity will be unattainable.

Now, in the case of the Armenian diaspora, and especially the non-Soviet diaspora, there are all sorts of economic, political and cultural differences of interest. Very often, these differences are antagonistic. An extreme example might serve to illustrate this point: An unemployed Iranian-Armenian should not be expected to view our national question the same way a wealthy U.S.-Armenian does. The former compatriot might, for example, feel that his right to live in the Armenian homeland is very important. In addition, he could probably be convinced that a socialist system must be set up in that



homeland to secure his or her life and work. And to achieve that goal, it would not be surprising if he would be willing to risk life and limb in a protracted armed struggle. We cannot say the same for the rich U.S.-Armenian, however. If such a person is at all even mildly interested in the "Armenian Question"—and by virtue of this distinction alone she would be part of a small and diminishing minority—she would likely be happy to limit the "solution" to official admission that the genocide took place. It is very improbable that a wealthy U.S.-Armenian would ever feel compelled to relocate to an already-liberated homeland, let alone fight for one. It is even less probable that this wealthy U.S.-Armenian would accept socialism, or even agree to expulsion of NATO from our historic homeland.

Stranger things have happened, of course, but the point of this illustration is the following: One should not assume that there is much of a basis for unity among two million or so diverse and dispersed people, just because many of them for one reason or another call themselves Armenians. We may agree that individuals and classes are social and historical constructions, but once "constructed," it is simply an empirical fact that they consciously and unconsciously pursue "interests." It would be an entirely far-fetched scenario, under the circumstances, if diasporan Armenians had no antagonistic conflicts of interest. And, sadly, if the past seven decades of diaspora has shown anything, it has shown that these differences of interest are antagonistic indeed. Examples are all too ready at hand—from the murder of communists and workers in pre-Soviet Armenia, to Karekin Nejdeh's collaboration with Hitler, and right down to contemporary anti-Soviet agitation.

Let's consider another example in which there is much less difference between the two conflicting elements. This time, let us take two third-generation petty-bourgeois French-Armenians. The economic, cultural, social and linguistic conditions of both of our hypothetical subjects are similar, but one marches with the Dashnak Party on April 24, and another marches with the progressive Armenian National Movement (M.N.A.). One considers Soviet Armenia to be "occupied by the Communists," while the other considers Soviet Armenia to be our people's legitimate state. One understands "socialism" to be capitalism along the western European model, while the other takes socialism to be workers' power. One emphasizes the efficacy of international diplomacy, while the other supports Armenian participation in the larger armed struggle against the Turkish state.

How are we to account for these political differences, these fundamentally different standpoints? Well, there are, of course, any of a number of explanations for this, including explanations of a biographical, "psychological" or ideological character. The reasons will differ from case to case. Whatever the explanation, however, the political differences separating our

two subjects are great enough to constitute a serious obstacle to unity. In the absence of a political shift on the part of one or both of these subjects (hopefully a shift on the part of the Dashnak Party supporter), unity simply will not be possible. Our own educational and agitational activities should aim to effect just such a shift from the right to the left.

Neither common descent from victims of genocide nor calls for unity against foreigners have obviated the kind of differences I have attempted to point up with these two illustrations. The second illustration, however, differs from the first in an important respect: Unlike the first case, it lacks the dimension of vested economic interest reinforcing psychological or ideological convictions. Some of the lines of fissure crisscrossing communities in the diaspora fall into this latter category, and it is our responsibility to win over members of all classes within each community to our view. Many of these diasporan Armenians will change their viewpoints if they are approached with a serious and realistic program of action, and if they see that practical steps have been taken to put the program into action. By embarking on armed activity, while simultaneously undertaking educational activity, years of work will result in a great degree of unity in the diaspora. Even at this, however, we should not fool ourselves into believing we could ever achieve complete unity (and, recalling that *ought* implies *can*, we should not overemphasize unity across the diaspora, at the expense of clarity of purpose).

So today the work to maximize unity must fall on the shoulders of those patriots among whom there is already a minimum political and ideological agreement. It is up to these patriots to develop their ideas, explain them to sympathizers and start immediately to take appropriate steps to transform those ideas into reality. If we are clear-sighted and patient, and if we take practical steps to realize a well-thought-out program, then we will be able to achieve a greater degree of unity than would be possible otherwise.

Unity for unity's sake, however, is a recipe for failure and disillusionment. As in the case of other peoples among whom class conflicts exist, so also within our people, there are processes which make complete unity impossible.

Having said this, however, we should recognize two features of diaspora which distinguish our situation from that of other peoples: (a) There are few direct relationships of economic exploitation among members of the diaspora, and (b) No diasporan force controls even a single centimeter of our homeland. In view of these two facts, our military actions should be directed against the Turkish state, and not against each other.

Unfortunately, certain circles do not subscribe to this view. In recent years, for example, undisciplined Dashnaks murdered Lebanese-Armenian hero, Hovanness Krikorian.<sup>2</sup> And currently, "Hagop Hagopian" and the small



circle of his closest followers have succeeded in killing Armenian patriots from many organizational backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to imagine anything less conducive to our goal than this.

As for demonstrations... it is understandable why there are two separate contingents at April 24 demonstrations. Fundamental and irreconcilable differences separate M.N.A. and other progressives from the rightists. It should go without saying, however, that fighting among demonstrators at events commemorating the genocide is inexcusable. We should resist these and other provocations which detract from our focus and sap our energy. Along with greater unity, this too will come with further self-education and practical experience.

*The following section was originally written in Fresnes Prison, possibly in May 1986. It was published by the Kaytzer group in London in November 1986, as number six of a series of pamphlets collectively entitled Discussions in the Armenian Liberation Movement.*

### WHY SOVIET ARMENIA DOES NOT CURRENTLY CONSTITUTE A TOTAL RESPONSE TO OUR NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

In response to the demand that diasporan Armenians\* be permitted to live a collective life as a national entity on their homeland, the following questions may arise: Doesn't the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic already constitute such a homeland? Why should Armenians persist in struggling "against all odds" to live in areas currently controlled by the Turkish state, when they already have Soviet Armenia?

In response to these questions we should consider three aspects of the our current situation: (1) present administrative and technical realities; (2) linguistic and cultural factors; and (3) the historic and cultural attachment of the Armenian people to their homeland in its entirety. While the first two considerations should not be underestimated, the third one is crucial. In the next few pages we shall have a few words to say about each of these considerations in turn.

First, however, I would like to interject a note about those who claim to be unwilling to immigrate to Soviet Armenia because they object to its economic and political system: The vast majority of such people will never relocate to "Western Armenia" either—and for exactly the same reasons. Armenians will only achieve the effective right to live in this part of our homeland by participating in the coming socialist revolution in Turkey.\* Those who are opposed to a socialist "Eastern Armenia" should be expected to object to a socialist "Western Armenia," too. Their rejection of socialism amounts to a political stand which, despite all protestations to the contrary, simply excludes most of them from participating in the future of our nation.<sup>4</sup> The most virulent of these pro-capitalists typically end up in their promised land of Los Angeles, where their loudly professed nationalism cannot be heard beyond a ten-mile radius of a shopping mall.

Nevertheless, we should recognize that some compatriots currently under the sway of pro-capitalist propaganda are in fact sincerely attached to our homeland. It is to be hoped that these compatriots will eventually "come around," in the course of struggle and future socialist construction. These considerations, however, do not have a direct bearing on the question of which part of the homeland they are to inhabit.



Having said this, we may now identify at least three considerations which have had an adverse impact on immigration to that part of our homeland within the borders of the Armenian S.S.R.:

### (1) The Administrative and Technical Realities of Immigration

Ever since the founding of Soviet Armenia in 1920, the main preoccupation of the state and the Communist Party has been economic development of the republic. It was hoped that progress in this area would engender progress in the social, cultural and political fields. And—despite the many detractors within the Soviet Union and outside it—this hope was not entirely unwarranted.

Soviet Armenia was founded at a time when the local population was suffering through an extreme economic crisis, as well as famine, epidemics and the onslaught of a foreign invading army bent on completing the genocide begun in 1915. Under such circumstances, the only realistic and responsible state policy was to secure the basic needs of the population. At great human cost, and with much sacrifice, a new economic system was established. The small and fragile pre-revolutionary industrial infrastructure, decimated by the civil war, was rebuilt and vastly expanded, and health and educational services were extended to a section of the population which had never before gained access to these.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the early years of the U.S.S.R., however, was simply that it survived. Whatever gains were made were won in the face of enormous difficulties—foreign invasion, civil war, economic isolation and sabotage, and an all-out war against fascist invaders who claimed the lives of over twenty million Soviet citizens (including almost as many Armenians as the entire war casualty figure of the U.S.). During this period, the stakes for the Armenian people were high. Turkey (which signed a friendship treaty with the Nazis four days before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union), massed its army on the Armenian and Georgian borders, with the clear intention of invading if Stalingrad fell. For the second time this century, the very physical existence of the Armenian people was placed in jeopardy.

As we all know, after four years of relentless resistance and unimaginable sacrifice, the Red Army put an end to the fascist aggressors. This victory produced a marked shift in the global balance of power, with the emergence of several allied states in Eastern Europe, and not long thereafter the victory of the revolution in China, led by the Communist Party of China.

After the war, the U.S.S.R. (and Soviet Armenia in particular) adopted more self-assertive policies. Immigration *en masse* from diaspora to the Armenian S.S.R. was encouraged, and formal claims were even advanced on parts of the Armenian homeland\* in Turkey. A policy of encouraging

massive immigration to Armenia was adopted, largely as a means of assuring Soviet Armenia's capacity to speedily rebuild a peacetime economy. Soviet territorial claims against Turkey were soon abandoned, thanks to Turkey's quick realignment with the U.S., as well as mounting international tensions during the Korean War and Turkey's concessions in other domains. As a result of these and other developments (including a U.S. monopoly on the atom bomb in the years immediately following the war), the Soviet peoples rededicated themselves to domestic economic development. The U.S.S.R. became an industrial power to be reckoned with.

The Armenian S.S.R.'s economic progress paved the way for renewed political and cultural overtures in the 1950s and 60s. This resulted in a revival of interest in the genocide and the events leading up to it, as well as a renewed willingness to play a greater role in diasporan cultural life. It was during this period that the Committee for Relations with Armenians Abroad was established.

Today, Soviet Armenia pursues the only realistic policy capable of ensuring the development of the republic and an end to stagnation. Nearly all state policies, including immigration policies, are viewed in light of their potential impact on economic development. From this perspective, there is no longer a perceived population vacuum in Soviet Armenia. Indeed, the population is expanding rapidly, at an annual rate of 2.5%.

This is one reason why immigrating to Soviet Armenia is not by any means a quick or automatic process. Applications by prospective immigrants are closely scrutinized these days, and are frequently rejected, or held up for years.<sup>5</sup>

Soviet Armenian administrative obstacles are only one side of the coin, however. Often, potential immigrants also come up against barriers erected by the governments of the countries in which they live. Some countries have strict regulations on emigration. In fact, in two of the countries where there are significant numbers of Armenians who have good reason to immigrate to the Armenian homeland, the process of emigration is very difficult, uncertain, time-consuming and can have rather dangerous consequences for those involved. These two countries are Turkey and Iran.

In Turkey, emigration laws have been drawn up in such a way as to put the emigre and her or his property at the mercy of government bureaucrats, limiting the amount of money that can be taken out of the country, etc. These bureaucrats confiscate as much property as they can from prospective emigrants. This makes emigration of any kind very difficult. When an Armenian in Turkey applies to emigrate to Soviet Armenia, however, the normal bureaucratic hitches turn into harassment. Turkish authorities consider the preference for living in Soviet Armenia to living in Turkey to be evidence of hostility toward the state. There are even articles in the Turkish



penal code which can be stretched to interpret emigration as "criminal."

Emigration from Iran is also fraught with difficulty. Although thousands of Iranian Armenians emigrated to Soviet Armenia between 1945 and 1977, there are still large numbers who have good reason to relocate to our homeland (whether in Soviet Armenia or within the present borders of the Turkish state), but cannot. For one thing, direct traffic between Iran and the U.S.S.R. is generally restricted to commerce. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic's conflicts with the U.S.S.R. have made travel to the Soviet Union—let alone emigration—even more difficult. As a result, would-be emigrants must first go to a third country, where they may have to wait for months or even years before receiving final permission to relocate. In this respect, then, the situation is similar to that of Armenians from Turkey, especially when one considers that, in both countries, bribes are almost always necessary at different stages of administrative work.

The recent slack in immigration to the Armenian S.S.R. is often put down entirely to the fact that the standard of living in Soviet Armenia is low compared to the much-vaunted bourgeois standard of living in the United States. I have tried to suggest, however, that considerations of comfort and convenience are not the whole story.

## (2) Linguistic and Cultural Nuances

Armenians constitute one people, one nation, one general cultural entity. Like any other people or nation, there are certain cultural variations or nuances which distinguish our general culture as a whole. Our people are understandably attached to these nuances.

The vast majority of diasporan Armenians are descendants of inhabitants of "Western Armenia." If they speak Armenian, members of the diaspora are likely to speak the western dialect, and an Armenian of the diaspora\* will likely identify with the forms of cultural expression of her ancestors' native region (often without being aware that hers is just one of many regional forms of Armenian cultural expression). So even if a diasporan Armenian were to immigrate to Soviet Armenia, that person would not be likely to live in the familiar cultural and linguistic context that she would prefer.

This, of course, is not to cast doubt on the "purity" of cultural expression in one or another region of the homeland or diaspora. Rather, the point is that not all cultural nuances are to be found within the borders of the Soviet republic. This fact diminishes the motivation of some potential immigrants to the Armenian S.S.R., and it may help to explain the historic and cultural attachment of Armenians of the diaspora to other regions of our historic homeland.<sup>6</sup>

## (3) The Historical and Cultural Attachment of the Armenian People to the Entire Armenian Homeland

Current administrative and technical realities, as well as linguistic and cultural variations, account to some degree for diminished immigration. Nevertheless, the question of diasporan immigration to Soviet Armenia cannot be fully understood without considering the attachment of Armenians to their homeland *in its entirety*. This point is related to the attachment to linguistic and cultural nuances mentioned above, but it goes beyond this, bringing us face-to-face with the question: Why doesn't Soviet Armenia constitute a comprehensive response to the Armenian people's national aspirations?

It should not be forgotten that the Armenian people originally developed into a distinct cultural entity—into a nation—on the territory of their homeland, a territory they inhabited for some three thousand years. As in the case of any other people or nation, there is great diversity within our own national culture. Despite this diversity, however, Armenians feel attached to all regions of their homeland, just as other peoples feel attached to all parts of their respective homelands. Armenians whose family origins are in Sasoon feel attached not only to Sasoon but also to Van, Kars and Yerevan. Likewise, Armenians from Soviet Armenia feel attached to Sasoon, Bitlis and Ararat, as well as Yerevan, Leninakan and Kirovakan. This is the normal result of national consciousness.

In view of this, it should be recognized that Armenians have the right to live in any part of our homeland they choose. Because of the present political, economic, social and military policies of the Turkish government, this principle is not currently practicable. For this reason, thousands of Armenians have had to immigrate to Soviet Armenia, despite the fact that they would have preferred to live in the regions of their family origins. To acknowledge this preference, however, is to acknowledge that immigration to Soviet Armenia does not amount to a renunciation of our people's right to live in other parts of their homeland. On the contrary, many Armenians who have immigrated to Soviet Armenia have done so largely thanks to their strong patriotic convictions. Some of them believe that by contributing to the social and economic life of Soviet Armenia they will somehow be contributing to a future reunification of our homeland. Thus, in a subjective sense, immigration should be considered a reconfirmation of attachment to our homeland—even those parts which are not currently included in the modern Armenian state.

In fact, at least half the population of Soviet Armenia itself traces its origins to areas outside the Soviet republic. And while these Soviet Armenians share with other Armenians a special attachment to the regions now controlled by



Turkey, it should also be remembered that Armenians whose family origins are in Soviet Armenia also feel attached to other parts of their homeland.

For the sake of illustration, let us draw an analogy. Earlier in this century, many French people were forced to flee to the south of their country to escape imprisonment and persecution by the Vichy government and the Nazis. Although the south of France was just as "French" as the north, these French patriots never lost their will to return to their homes in the north, and many of them were willing to give their lives in the struggle for their right to return. Likewise, many French patriots from the south joined the resistance to liberate the north. Although their origins and homes were in the south, they still felt an attachment to the north of their homeland. (It is interesting to note that Hitler's French collaborators referred to these anti-fascist resistance fighters—many of whom were communists—as *terrorists*.)

Now, let us ask what would have happened if the Nazi occupation had lasted until the present day. In this case (which, by the way, is also analogous to the nonhypothetical situation of millions of Palestinians in refugee camps and diaspora today), French patriots should still be expected to feel an attachment to the areas under occupation, even if they had never seen these areas at all. Despite the diversity of French culture, despite regional differences in dress, dialect and cuisine, French people are attached to all parts of their homeland. In just the same manner, Armenians are attached to all parts of their homeland, regardless of whether their ancestors hail from Bitlis, Kharpert or Van. Similarly, Armenians who are attached to all parts of their homeland—no matter where they may live—should work to achieve the right to live in any part of our homeland they wish.

Soviet Armenia should not be expected to be what its geographic boundaries preclude it from being. Within its current borders, at any rate, Soviet Armenia does not represent the entirety of the Armenian homeland. We should not expect mass immigration from the diaspora, as long as the question of other parts of our homeland has not been resolved.

*"Armenian-Turkish Dialog" was posted from Fresnes Prison at an uncertain date. It appeared in the January 1987 issue of Sardarabad.*

## ARMENIAN-TURKISH DIALOG

In the Armenian press and patriotic circles, we frequently hear about the need for representatives of the Armenian and Turkish peoples to sit down together and agree in some way on the rights of the Armenian people. Most of us agree that such a dialog is needed. Unfortunately, dialog with representatives of the Turkish people\* is too often confused with dialog with representatives of the Turkish state.

The Turkish state should not be considered the representative of the Turkish people. That state oppresses and exploits the vast majority of the Turkish people. Turkish police, prison authorities, military chiefs and courts imprison, torture and kill Turkish progressives, trade unionists and socialists; and schools and pro-government media in Turkey malign militant workers and revolutionaries of all national identities. Just as the Turkish state is the enemy of the Armenian and Kurdish peoples, so too it is the enemy of the Turkish people, not their representative. So if we wish to engage in dialog with representatives of the Turkish people we should seek them outside of the state bureaucracy and repressive apparatus.

Of course, there are other very important reasons why we should not even attempt to talk to representatives of the Turkish state. For one thing, it would be futile. With its racist and expansionist official ideology, the Turkish state is the natural continuation of the Young Turk and Ataturk traditions. We have no moral point of connection with a fascist military regime. As a forward base of imperialism, the Turkish state secures the interests of the multinational corporations and the U.S. Pentagon, rather than social justice and the rights of peoples. A state which does not even recognize the rights of over ten million Kurds\* within its own borders could never be expected to recognize the national rights of a few million Armenians living outside of those borders. And this should be expected to hold true even if foreign states were ever to support Armenian claims. Representatives of the present Turkish state would never negotiate with us in good faith, even if we were willing to do so.

Fortunately, this state and economic system are not eternal. Conditions for a revolution in Turkey are slowly maturing. The Kurdish people are developing their struggle; Turkish workers are organizing, and various minorities are finding new ways of resisting. One day, these revolutionary forces could become the representatives of a new and fundamentally different Turkish state.



Emerging Turkish and Kurdish revolutionary forces share a struggle and an ideological orientation similar to that of Armenian revolutionaries. If we want an Armenian-Turkish dialog, then, we should direct our overtures to the revolutionaries, not to representatives of a state which is our implacable enemy. Armed struggle, rather than dialog, is the way to approach the Turkish state—incessant and unrelenting armed struggle, until the repressive and bureaucratic structure of that state is annihilated.

Here perhaps certain Armenians will interrupt: "Watch out! We once cooperated with the Young Turks, and we saw what happened then..." The response to this objection is simple. First of all, the politics, ideology and social and economic programs of today's genuinely revolutionary Turkish organizations have nothing to do with the racist and expansionist projects of the Young Turks.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, our understanding of cooperation has nothing to do with subjection to other forces or the disarmament of our own forces. To talk with the present regime would be like cooperating with the Young Turks. The only realistic way to put an end once and for all to the policies of the Young Turks is to join our Turkish and Kurdish revolutionary allies in their struggle against the present Turkish regime.

Actually, a dialog—and even cooperation—between Armenian and Turkish revolutionaries would not be an entirely unprecedented step. Such a dialog, for example, was initiated six years ago. In 1980, at a time when ASALA's ranks were rapidly expanding, that group established ties with more than one revolutionary Turkish organization. Dialog and cooperation came very naturally, and there was no need for any intermediaries. Not only were relations cordial from the outset, but our interaction progressed in the warm atmosphere so familiar to comrades who struggle side by side. We frequently met Armenians within their ranks, too. Despite some political differences, we were able to work together closely. Some of these organizations still have positions regarding the Armenian national question which are not exactly the positions we would like to see; nevertheless, they are a great improvement over the positions we saw six years ago.

ASALA-Revolutionary Movement considers the establishment of an Armenian presence within Turkish borders to be our most important means of struggle. A necessary part of this strategy is not only to engage in dialog but to actively cooperate with all revolutionary forces in Turkey. A period of mutual understanding and the evolution of political positions has already been initiated. With future cooperation, this process will develop. Meanwhile, we do not have one single word to say to representatives of the Turkish state—just a struggle to build.

*"Assimilation and Alternatives" appeared in the April-May 1987 issue of Kaytzer, and a slightly revised version appeared in Sardarabad in July of the same year. Melkonian prefaced the latter version, saying that although most of the journal's readers were probably aware of the points he was making, "nevertheless, I felt a need to present a rough summary of my views on the subject of assimilation."*

## ASSIMILATION AND ALTERNATIVES

Over the course of the past seven decades, cultural assimilation has taken its toll more or less rapidly, resulting in a generation of non-Armenians whose immediate predecessors were Armenians.<sup>8</sup> The disappearance of cultural identity in diaspora is not currently linked to a physical threat; nevertheless, it is still involuntary. As human beings, we are forced to adapt to our economic, social, cultural and linguistic surroundings. In diaspora, this "fitting in" may be retarded for one reason or another but, in the long run, assimilation is bound to overwhelm every single community in the diaspora.

Those who accept Armenian culture\* as their own and who wish to live within an Armenian cultural context cannot help but resent involuntary assimilation. Today, the need to resist assimilation is felt as much as—if not more than—at any other time in the history of the diaspora. Before taking a look at the purported alternatives to assimilation, let us first consider past trends in diasporan life.

In the years immediately following the genocide, Armenian refugees were, by and large, still "psychologically" tied to their homeland. At that time most Armenians still believed that their life outside Armenia\* would only be temporary. It was widely hoped that through some sort of international arrangement or new policies in Turkey it would be possible to return to live in their ancestral homeland. Meanwhile, there were more immediate problems to contend with. Most of the refugees were dirt poor, so their main preoccupation was to secure the minimal necessities of daily life.

As time passed and it became apparent that there would be no quick return to the western part of our homeland, three main alternatives suggested themselves to diasporan Armenians. First, some opted to immigrate to the small eastern part of our homeland, Soviet Armenia. In the years leading up to World War II, up to 50,000 Armenians from outside the Soviet Union chose this option. By doing so, they integrated themselves into the cultural life of part of Armenia, thus removing themselves from conditions conducive to assimilation.



A second response of Armenians to the threat of assimilation is exemplified by the policy of "preserving Armenian-ness" (*hayabahbanum*). This policy, promoted by institutions in the diaspora such as the church and the three traditional political parties,<sup>9</sup> soon assumed the status of something like the "official" response to assimilation. The proclaimed goal of *hayabahbanum* was to preserve the Armenian language, cultural traditions and patriotic feelings in general, until a return to our homeland could be arranged by higher powers. In effect, people were simply supposed to "preserve" themselves as Armenians until the promised day came for all to return. In the pre-WW II years, this policy affected the great majority of diasporan Armenians.

As a result of *hayabahbanum*, Armenian schools, social organizations and health and welfare unions were established. It was not long, however, before these institutions, as well as the church itself and other focal points of community life, became apples of discord over which political factions contended, to enhance their influence within the various communities. To make matters worse, those who promoted *hayabahbanum* offered no direction to those who wished to do something concrete to return to their homeland. As a result, they effectively enforced an uneasy passivity within communities of the diaspora.

Finally, there was the option of "voluntary" assimilation. Some Armenians, traumatized by their memories of the genocide, lost all hope or will to return. Succumbing to the relentless social, economic and legal pressures of their new surroundings, they resigned themselves to assimilation. In some cases, the feeling seemed to be that the sooner they assimilated, the more rapidly they could shed the terrible memories of the past and concentrate on the new challenges confronting them.

For other refugees, on the other hand, assimilation was a bitter pill which they did not swallow of their own free will. Resistance to assimilation has had its price, however. The more stubbornly diasporan Armenians clung to their "Armenian-ness," the more they were forced to shut themselves up in ghettos. Despite their isolation, however, even those who were most committed to *hayabahbanum* were obliged to adopt new lifestyles, mentalities and cultural norms. In spite of the best efforts of the church and community schools, the use of the Armenian language, especially in written form, dropped off among the second generation.<sup>10</sup>

The post-WW II years ushered in a new period, corresponding to the domination of community life by the children of the genocide survivors. By hook or by crook, a large part of this new generation fought its way out of the working class and into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisies of their respective diasporan countries. Ties to life in the diaspora were strengthened, as those who managed to acquire material wealth and petty-bourgeois status

had a correspondingly greater emotional investment in their countries of birth than in Armenia. Although many second-generation diasporan Armenians still spoke Armenian and clung to certain Armenian cultural motifs, assimilation became the rule, despite some visible and vocal exceptions.

During this period, meanwhile, the process of assimilation was also taking its toll among diasporan Armenians who were wage earners. With a few exceptions in the "Middle East" and elsewhere, local languages other than Armenian dominated their daily lives, while local social and cultural norms gradually replaced the old Armenian traits.

In the face of this advancing process of assimilation, only two alternatives remained for those who wished to remain Armenian: either immigrate to the Soviet Socialist Republic or persevere as long as possible with *hayabahbanum*. At first, a significant number of people availed themselves of the first alternative. From the end of WW II until 1948, approximately 90,000 Armenians from outside the U.S.S.R. immigrated to Soviet Armenia. Later on, however, when Soviet immigration policies became more restrictive, this alternative became all but impossible. Diasporan Armenians found themselves either willingly or unwillingly forced to accept *hayabahbanum* as a stopgap against cultural assimilation.

At the same time, efforts at *hayabahbanum* became fragmented, as a result of maneuvering by parties with conflicting political orientations. This diminished the efficiency of some institutions and further disenchanted members of the diasporan communities.

Admittedly, "preservation" policies met with temporary success in several communities. Schools, churches and clubs continued to be built, associations multiplied and multilingual community publications enjoyed a considerable readership. All of this served to sustain some degree of attachment to Armenian cultural life, although the strength and extent of this attachment varied from community to community.

Within countries in the immediate proximity of Turkey, the vast majority of Armenians by and large maintained a community life defined primarily in terms of a common cultural identity. These communities also supported a handful of more educated intellectuals—teachers, members of the clergy, journalists, entertainers, party functionaries and the like. Assimilation was reduced to a minimum, at least for a while.

On the other hand, in North and South America and western Europe large numbers of Armenians already lived outside of an Armenian community context. Many of them were only minimally aware of their cultural heritage, while their daily lives very much reflected the conditions of their local "host" countries. The general cultural level of these communities was noticeably lower than that of their compatriots in the countries near Turkey. All the same, some pockets of community life persisted, presided over by a



narrowing circle of intellectuals. Clearly, assimilation was already far outstripping "preservation" efforts.

The opposition between the tendency toward assimilation and the policy of *hayababbanum* became even more acute as the third generation came of age. It became clear that everywhere in the diaspora Armenians were doomed to eventual assimilation. In some countries, this process was taking place rapidly; in others, it was slower, but it was taking its toll just the same. Even in relatively active communities such as the one in Lebanon, the values and mentality of the average Armenian increasingly came to resemble those of the local population.

This process, of course, did not go unnoticed. Many diasporan Armenians realized that the only way out was a collective life in our homeland. The "return" to the homeland had always been a major theme—at least in a folkloric way—among political circles. But for some third-generation diasporan Armenians, for whom the problem of assimilation was an immediate and obvious reality, this theme began to take on a more serious political significance. It became clear to them that, no matter how many schools, churches or clubs were built, no matter how many associations sprang up, and no matter how many papers were published, the process of assimilation would inevitably overwhelm the diaspora.

Once again, one response to this situation was to relocate from the diaspora to Soviet Armenia. In the sixties and seventies, over 30,000 diasporan Armenians did so.<sup>11</sup> However, these immigrants represented a small minority of diasporan Armenians. Some patriotic and forward-looking Armenians who remained in diaspora began to look for new ways to reconstitute Armenian collective life in that part of the homeland which remains under Turkish government control.

The fiftieth annual commemoration of the genocide was an occasion to seriously reappraise the policies of the past and the situation that had evolved as a partial result of those policies. By 1965, it was clear that time was running out for the diaspora. Even in communities as cohesive as those of Iran and Lebanon, *hayababbanum*, no matter how actively pursued, was getting us no closer to our rights in our homeland. On the contrary, with every passing year, the size of the diaspora as a whole was being reduced by assimilation. And as the communities were whittled away by attrition, this in turn reduced our potential to struggle for an Armenian national life in our homeland. The diaspora was qualitatively and quantitatively diminishing. The quaint notion that Armenians should have as many children as possible to increase our political potential lost subscribers in the diaspora, since raising ten children in the United States, for example, usually amounted to raising ten Northamericans, rather than ten Armenians. A new political approach was needed.

In the sixties and seventies, some second- and third-generation Armenians in communities throughout the diaspora came to be influenced by contemporaneous national liberation struggles. The Vietnamese people's victory in the face of the overwhelming resources and technological advantages of the enemy, as well as the closer-to-home example of the Palestinian Resistance, served as sources of inspiration. Some Armenians began to participate in local struggles, where they gained much valuable experience. Armenian participants in the events of May '68 in France, the Lebanese National Movement and the anti-Shah movement in Iran learned about the irreplaceable role of militant struggle guided by socialist ideology and organizational principles. Drawing from these lessons, new groups emerged.

The broad popular support enjoyed by the armed propaganda campaign waged from 1975 to 85 reflected the realization that direct action had to be taken to build a new struggle. More and more young Armenians became aware that it was suicidal to continue following a policy of "preservation," while pinning all hopes for attaining national rights on the diplomatic wrangling of various supposedly influential governments. It became clear that the Armenian people had to build a struggling force of their own. Small armed groups were formed in more than one country with large Armenian communities.<sup>12</sup> Through armed propaganda, many patriotic Armenians came to understand that, to reconstruct our collective life in that part of our homeland under Ankara's control, there was no alternative but revolutionary armed struggle.

Today, the option of immigrating to Soviet Armenia still exists, but the alternative of armed struggle in present-day Turkey is gaining support among the third generation in diaspora. Indeed, many of us have come to believe that this option is the only realistic means open for diasporan Armenians to do something concrete for our national rights in those parts of our homeland currently within the borders of the Turkish state.

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Our patriotic liberation struggle will be protracted and will require much preparation and support. Every bit of potential in the diaspora must be mobilized. All other projects must be re-prioritized and subordinated to the requirements of waging the struggle in Turkey. As it stands today, *hayababbanum* is often in conflict with the priorities of this struggle, since it has sapped the limited human and material potential which we have at our disposal in diaspora. Indeed, advocates of this policy are often publicly hostile to our struggle. Nevertheless, some specific institutions which arose as a result of *hayababbanum* might be redirected to serve the struggle. Such is the case with respect to some Armenian



schools, medical aid societies, the press and cultural organizations.

If and when these institutions begin to function in such a way as to support the struggle, they will at last have proven by their actions that they truly serve our people. However, if they continue to operate in an apolitical—or even reactionary—manner, simply seeking to prolong their own existence at any cost, then these same institutions should be treated as obstacles to a solution of our national question. The diaspora does not possess such vast assets that we can continue to allow precious resources to be siphoned *away from* our struggle—let alone *against* it. Nor can we afford to waste time dealing with obstructionists. The fact is that time is not on our side. Every day that passes without work to build our vanguard organization makes it less likely that we will attain anything other than our most minimal demands for a solution to the national question. And even these minimum demands are unlikely ever to be secured unless we redouble our organizational efforts in short order. We must regroup and mobilize now.

What does this mean in practical terms? It means deploying such institutions as community schools, periodicals and cultural events to promote armed struggle. It means educating our people in the principles of scientific socialism, which is the theoretical and ideological framework necessary for effectively reorganizing our forces. It means seriously informing our communities of current developments in Turkey and the Kurdish homeland,\* and of the revolutionary forces operating there. It means mobilizing community action in local progressive movements which offer us support and much valuable experience. And most importantly, it means winning the material and moral support of our comrades in Iran and Turkey who can prepare the ground for our struggle.

*This text is a revised version of an article written in Poissy Prison and dated June 23, 1988. The translation from the original Armenian is the author's.*

## A CRITIQUE OF PAST NOTIONS

Part of our task of self education is to vanquish chimeras. This is an ongoing task to which many comrades have applied themselves, and it is a task to which I shall apply myself here. To be honest, there was no grand rationale for taking up the following five or six issues in one article. It is just striking that various permutations of each of these issues reappear frequently in diasporan publications and in discussions with compatriots in the diaspora. Of course, it would not be worth critiquing these notions if they were merely benign fairy tales or harmless misunderstandings. Unfortunately, however, these are not necessarily the most debilitating notions prevailing in the diaspora. They are just five harmful notions which have gained currency, and about which I have been thinking lately.

### The Demand for Recognition of the Genocide

After the genocide, the first concern of our people was to survive over the short term, until it would be possible to return to the homeland. "Recognition" of the genocide was not even a concern for the survivors. Family, friends and neighbors had been killed and deported; death marches had been endured; houses, neighborhoods, ancestral villages and towns had been destroyed; land had been confiscated; and a multitude of immediate challenges had to be met on pain of starvation and further destruction. There was nothing especially controversial about any of this.

It was only after the term "genocide" had been coined and formally defined that the question of "recognition" began to be posed. A clear definition of "genocide"—a definition which brought with it great moral approbation—did not even gain currency until after the fascist genocide against the Jews (other victims of fascist mass annihilation, such as the Gypsies and twenty million Soviet citizens of various religious backgrounds, seem to have been relegated to the backstage).

By this time, the three traditional political parties in diaspora<sup>13</sup> had unanimously adopted the policy of *hayabahbanum*. According to this policy, Armenians were to preserve their cultural uniqueness in the diaspora until some sort of hypothetical "international diplomatic developments" forced Turkey to accept responsibility for the Armenian genocide and make some sort of reparations.

As a concomitant of *hayabahbanum*, people also still believe that somehow recognition of the genocide is the key to our people's rights. This is



based on the superstition that "international diplomacy" represents an autonomous force which can redraw borders regardless of realities on the ground in the disputed area. After years of diplomatic failure, it is time we put this superstition to rest.

As hopes for a "Free, Independent and United Armenia" have faded, it has become increasingly common to hear Armenian grievances reduced to some form of official acknowledgement of the historical veracity of the genocide of 1915-18. This sentiment is especially prevalent among the more assimilated members of the diaspora, for whom there is no question of ever relocating to the Armenian homeland. Sometimes those who equate the "Armenian Question" with recognition of the genocide will smile knowingly, as if concealing some precious secret. Then, in whispers, they will let you in on the great plan: First obtain official recognition from governments and international bodies such as the European Parliament or the Socialist International. After that, Ankara will be forced somehow to admit the reality of the genocide. On occasion, there is an even more imaginative addendum to this story, to the effect that once Ankara admits the reality of the genocide, it will somehow be "forced" to agree to the establishment of a "Free, Independent Armenia" as well.

A couple of observations might be relevant here: First of all, it should be apparent by now that in the realm of politics, moralistic injunctions account for next to nothing, compared to more tangible state interests. It is not in the interests of the present Turkish state ever to recognize even the most innocuous of our people's rights. But even if, for the sake of argument, we were to imagine something of this sort happening, Turkish representatives would never link "recognition" to any present right of the Armenian people. Those who believe that acknowledgement of the genocide will lead to recognition of the Armenian people's right to live in our historic homeland are making a big mistake, and they especially overlook the fact that the present Turkish state has racist, chauvinist, colonial and fascist foundations. Our analyses and work must proceed from this fact. Let us be realistic. Instead of hoping that a murderous regime will one day acknowledge the reality of the Armenian genocide, what we need to do is to contribute to overthrowing the Turkish state and establishing a new revolutionary state in its place.

Recognition of the genocide by reactionary forces in no way brings us closer to our rights. The European Parliament's June 1987 resolution condemning the genocide provides a ready illustration of this point. Among a politically immature segment of the diaspora, this was heralded as a "great victory." In the end, however, the resolution did not have the slightest effect on our people's rights to live in our homeland. Indeed, the European Parliament, faithful guardian of imperialist interests, even added a few lines

to the resolution, condemning the Armenian people's patriotic struggle as "terrorism." Furthermore, in the same resolution, the parliament stated explicitly that the reality of the genocide in no way justifies questioning Turkey's territorial integrity.

Not only is such "recognition" not a victory for us, it is a position of animosity. Fortunately, the European Parliament has absolutely no influence on the lands and peoples of our homeland now in Turkey.

For clear-sighted Armenian patriots, recognition of the genocide is neither our goal nor is it the key to our homeland. It's not our concern to prove the historical veracity of the genocide for the thousand-and-first time. The genocide has been documented first-hand by thousands of survivors and eyewitnesses. Moreover, Armenians do not live in the greater part of their homeland, which they have inhabited continuously up to 1915. This fact alone absolves us of any obligation whatsoever to "prove" that the genocide and mass deportations took place. For the honest and the knowledgeable, the truth has long been clear. Those who constantly call on us to provide evidence that the genocide took place are advancing agendas that have nothing to do with scholarship and historiography. And these agendas—whether they be geopolitical, strategic, trade or whatever—will not change through the efforts of historians, lobbyists, diplomats or any other "clever" tacticians.

The positions of foreign governments will only change when the Armenian people become a force on the ground, as a part of the revolution inside Turkey. If and when we create a *fait accompli* that no one will be able to ignore, this will carry more weight than one and one-half million historiographical facts. Recognizing this, clear-minded patriots have better things to do than to run around the "official recognition" squirrel wheel. That's not what our struggle is about. We draw only one conclusion from governments which cast doubt on the veracity of the Armenian genocide; their position is simply another instance of opposition to our people's rights.

It is futile to beg for "genocide recognition" from far-off governments and the allies of our enemy. On the other hand, it is very necessary and reasonable that we cooperate as equals with the peoples and revolutionary forces that exist in the region. We share a common enemy with those peoples, and our interests and goals converge.

All the same, we have nothing to beg from our allies. On the contrary, as revolutionaries, we have *demands* of those among them who have not yet clarified their position vis-a-vis our national question. Indeed, since the interests of our Turkish and Kurdish allies converge with ours, and since our futures are interdependent, Armenian revolutionaries are duty-bound to encourage them to take correct positions relative to our demands. At the same time, we expect them to give us detailed explanations of their struggles and goals.



In the final analysis, the key to our homeland is our people's own determination, fighting capacity and willingness to sacrifice. Either the Armenian people themselves will build their own struggle, or no one will. And in the latter case, our legitimate rights will never be realized. It is as simple—and as difficult—as that.

### Armenian Intellectuals

By an "intellectual" (*mdavoragan*) I mean someone who devotes much time to theoretical and ideological practice, and who spends at least an important part of her daily life in activities relevant to the direction of social institutions. An intellectual need not earn a living by engaging in any special "brain work," nor is intellectual work the prerogative of an elite. Anyone involved in any sort of work can be considered an "intellectual" if she has developed analytic and creative capacities which are applied to decision-making in some social realm, whether that be at the point of production, in mass organizations or governing institutions, etc. Broadly speaking, then, the category of intellectual could include writers, scientists, political figures, artists, teachers, students and doctors—as well as industrial workers, domestic workers, farmers and other laborers who use their mental capacities to better understand their environment and to contribute to the guidance of society.

There are more or less progressive intellectuals, and there are more or less reactionary ones. As patriots and revolutionaries, our moral point of reference is always the general interests of the broad mass of (nonexploiting) people, as a whole. If an intellectual helps in some way to satisfy the real needs of our people, then that intellectual's work is valuable to us. If an intellectual's ideas have never extended beyond the surface of paper, then she has yet to prove her value. On the other hand, any intellectual whose activity has clearly brought deplorable results to our people and who refuses to desist in this activity should be considered an adversary.

Throughout the nineteenth century and up to the beginning of the twentieth century, most Armenians were peasants with little or no formal education. Only a minority could read and write in any language, and few of the literate ones had a higher education. Under those conditions, there was a much sharper break between "intellectuals" and "non-intellectuals." Although special people who were active in the fields of politics, literature and education often left the Armenian homeland to pursue their higher education, in most cases their attention remained focused on the homeland. Most of the nineteenth-century intellectuals whose work continues to be influential today were instrumental in providing a sense of direction and leadership to people living in the Armenian homeland. They inspired, mobilized and organized. Indeed, some of them returned to their homeland

expressly to fulfill their national obligations. Others, of course, settled in Istanbul. Although this was not the true center of our national struggle, it was the political and cultural capital of the empire which colonially dominated our homeland. Intellectuals in Istanbul could at least share the concerns of the bulk of our people.

Thus, the most venerable intellectuals of the last century were not only talkers and writers; they were national leaders who recognized that, in order to exercise their talents in the service of their nation, they had to share the life and daily problems of our people. In spite of the exceptional fact that they had received college educations, these "engaged intellectuals" were inextricably united with the great mass of the people, augmenting their pre-existing esteem for education, encouraging a sense of national cohesiveness and providing leadership. Some of them even participated in the armed defense of our people.

Because the best of these intellectuals placed themselves on the front line with our people, uniting their ideas with political practice, they were considered to be a threat to the Young Turk regime. As a result, starting on April 24, 1915, many of our finest intellectuals were among the first victims of the genocide perpetrated by the Young Turk regime.

Because of this great sacrifice, intellectuals were accorded great respect by survivors of the genocide. And something of this same mentality has survived to the present day. Today, the title "intellectual" still inspires uncritical confidence and deference from some people, and some self-proclaimed intellectuals continue to expect unqualified patronage from their respective diasporan communities. In the interim, however, much has changed. Nowadays, it is not easy to discern the difference between "intellectuals" and most other people. The great majority of our people has received some sort of formal education; they have access to the print and electronic media, and in a general sense each individual is more capable of participating in day-to-day intellectual life.

In Soviet Armenia, a significant number of people are identified as intellectuals because they are paid for "brain work" and are members of the Writers' Union, the Artists' Union or the Academy of Sciences. By living among our people in our homeland, many Soviet Armenian "intellectuals" have been able to serve our people well in cultural, scientific, political, economic and health fields. Their influence, moreover, has reached the diaspora, thanks in large part to the work of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Armenians Abroad. Some exceptional Soviet Armenian intellectuals have even played a truly leading role, in the best traditions of the nineteenth-century intellectuals. In the field of poetry alone, Silva Kaputikian, Hovanness Shiraz and Baroyr Sevak illustrate this point well. And it is encouraging to hear that an increasing number of their colleagues have been



assuming socially responsible positions of late, especially in relation to support for the people of Artsakh.

Unfortunately, the situation in diaspora is not the same. For one thing, it is probably true that the large majority of intellectuals in the diaspora must make a living at full-time jobs which are irrelevant (or even inimical) to their intellectual interests. In spite of this, however, those who are forced to engage in their preferred work only during their free time often produce higher-quality work—and work that is more useful to their communities—than the “professional intellectuals.” (Perhaps their financial independence from traditional institutions has a salutary effect; perhaps also their jobs keep them in closer contact with the conditions of the “host” societies in which they live.)

Today there is a general habit in the diaspora to call anyone an intellectual who has a higher education, or who writes for a publication or addresses a crowd while wearing a tie. Sadly, a person’s “intellectual” status has come to depend as much on the form of a person’s presentation as on the substance of what is said. In more than one case, it seems as though the more aggressively a candidate expresses his or her opinion, the more “intellectual” that person is considered to be. In addition, the title often has little or no connection to any practical work in the interest of our communities or our people. This, of course, is not particularly surprising.

What is surprising, however, is that often such personalities are heralded by diasporan institutions and non-Armenians alike as national leaders or community representatives. Some of them entertain the elitist opinion that intellectuals must devote themselves solely to “intellectual” tasks. These are the notorious “apolitical intellectuals” who see themselves as providing brilliant insights and directing other people’s actions while remaining inactive themselves. More often than not, by “keeping their own hands clean,” apolitical intellectuals passively acquiesce to conservative or right-wing political forces.

Of course, there are also those who profess to be political intellectuals while “keeping their hands clean.” With reference to this latter category of intellectuals I would like to interject a remark: It is about time that we loudly repudiate the romantic conceit that “my pen is my gun.” Pens are pens and guns are guns. Right now we have a greater need for guns than pens. Furthermore, there is no reason why a pen-user cannot also use a gun. (In fact, there is evidence that literacy increases one’s accuracy with a rifle.) Misak Manouchian and Garlen Ananian<sup>14</sup> were exemplary intellectuals, and both were gun-users as well as pen-users. We should follow their example. There are more than enough “intellectuals” in diaspora. What we need are *fighters, soldiers, fedaiis*.

Today, as at any other period in our history, every patriot who is sincerely

committed to his or her nation must demonstrate that commitment in a practical manner. The test of commitment is in practical work, not emotional speeches and literary articles. Serious speeches and articles have their place, of course, but ideas remain worthless if they do not serve as guides to further practical activity. And if self-proclaimed political intellectuals lead lives which are at odds with their militant declarations, then they themselves are worse than worthless.

Today, the old attitude toward intellectuals is no longer appropriate. Too often, it leads us to overestimate the views of some people and underestimate the views of others. And too often this old notion serves only to force a wedge between “common people” and a few brainy leaders. Today the attention and resources of the diaspora must be redirected to support members of our new vanguard who will directly participate in the struggle within our historic homeland. And to do this, we need a more democratic and egalitarian conception of intellectual activity—one which encourages critical thinking by large numbers of people.

### “Victory Is Ours”

We have all heard this optimistic slogan before. It is repeated loudly by spokespeople representing just about every Armenian political tendency. The impression one gets is that these people have no doubts about the Armenian people’s victory. It is worth asking, however, whether this slogan should be adopted at this early stage of our struggle.

Blind faith in the inevitability of victory springs from the moralistic myth that Justice will win in the end. This, however, is not at all a foregone conclusion. Our right to live in our homeland currently under control of Ankara is very, very “just.” Unfortunately, victory is not secured by occupying the moral high ground. Victory, rather, must be wrested from our adversaries by force of arms.

Optimism of the will is one thing, but it should be tempered with pessimism of the intellect. To be realistic, we must admit that, if the situation in diaspora continues as it has been, we will never achieve victory. If we continue to squander our resources and energy, instead of building toward an armed presence on the ground in our historical homeland, we surely will never achieve victory. It is never wise to mislead oneself or one’s allies. We should face the fact that we confront the possibility of failure. Once we do this, we might take our responsibilities more seriously and get down to work.

### “National Duties” in Relation to the Next Generation

Slightly over one-half of our people lives in Soviet Armenia and the surrounding Armenian regions, including Karabagh, Nakhichevan and



Akhalkalak. Those who live in Soviet Armenia have access to the cultural and educational facilities necessary to secure an Armenian national identity and national life. Under these conditions, it is reasonable to assume that the number of children born to Armenians will roughly equal the number of future Armenian adults. Thus, by raising large families, the number of Armenians can be expected to increase. So, purely from the point of view of increasing the size of our nation, raising large families serves this goal. (There are, of course other factors to consider here, including population density, and the ability of the land to sustain the population. But this is not the place to delve into these questions.)

In the Armenian regions in the vicinity of the Armenian S.S.R., our culture takes roots in its "natural soil," too. Even in regions such as Karabagh and Nakhichevan, Armenians have managed to retain their national identity. It is clear that at least in these two regions, our people have been subjected to economic, administrative and cultural pressures that were intended to obstruct their national development. Armenians there have been denied access to Armenian-language schools, newspapers and books, cultural programs and even the ability to make a living. By pursuing chauvinistic policies, Azeri officials succeeded in driving the majority Armenian population out of Nakhichevan, and many Armenians out of Karabagh. Despite everything, however, the Armenians who remained in these regions have for the most part retained their national identity. Thus, it would seem that in these regions, too, children born to Armenians are almost certain to be raised as Armenians. Accordingly, raising large families will directly increase the demographic presence of Armenians. In this respect, then, increasing the number of Armenians has immediate significance to the people there, as a national responsibility.

The situation is fundamentally different in the diaspora, however. The rate of assimilation differs from one diasporan community to the next; nevertheless, assimilation ineluctably takes its toll throughout the diaspora. In all cases, the effects of assimilation increase from generation to generation. Under such conditions, the children of Armenian parents—especially in the "West"—do not necessarily grow up to feel an attachment to Armenian culture or the Armenian homeland. This is certainly not a "crime" on the personal level: a child does not choose her country of birth. Nevertheless, the fact remains that raising large families in the diaspora is not a sure way to increase our strength.

Moreover, raising children who identify themselves as Armenians should not be considered a "national duty," if those children are also raised to be politically passive. The success of patriotic activity should not be measured by the number of warm bodies in attendance at a dinner-dance; it should be measured, rather, by the frequency, intensity and efficiency of practical

activity in the struggle. If we wish to speak of national duties in this context, then perhaps our only *duty* in relation to children is to raise them to participate actively in the struggle against the Turkish state.

Having said this, however, another point needs to be added: It is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect a future generation in diaspora to engage in a struggle that we ourselves have not already begun. Many of us are acquainted with nationalistic parents who complain that their children are at best lukewarm about their "national duties." If anyone is at fault in such a situation, however, it is certainly the older generation, which has done next to nothing to provide our youth with living role models, militant institutions or any other halfway inspiring entry into our struggle. And if it is true that children learn by imitating their parents, then twenty years from now we should expect another generation of clever, passive armchair "revolutionaries" to deliver the same tired sermons to a much smaller audience of even more bored and skeptical children.

The most important national duty is to participate in our struggle *today*. Whoever does not personally participate now should not try to make up for his or her shortcomings by raising another generation to undertake a project they themselves never bothered to initiate.

Some of us have had first-hand experience in non-Armenian resistance movements. I, for example, have known Kurdish guerrillas who ranged in age from fifteen to sixty-five. All of them were armed and on the march high in the mountains of Kurdistan. I never heard a fighter in the *peshmerga* say: "Oh, I'm forty years old. That's too old to fight to defend my people and my homeland." Our Kurdish comrades are simply responding in the manner that their struggle requires. Now, I suggest that the Armenian struggle, if it is to succeed, requires at least that much commitment from every one of us. If we prepare ourselves now, we may serve as an example to the next generation. The priority, however, is *today's* struggle, since without that there is little we can expect from the next generation.

### Armenian Women and Their Role

If this list were arranged in order of importance, this heading would have occurred at the beginning. I am not aware of one nation in existence today in which the situation of women is anything better than deplorable. And in too many cases the situation is worse than deplorable.

Within Armenian communities, the physical and mental abuse of women, which is sometimes excused under the guise of "traditional family values," is only the most obvious form of male supremacism. Other manifestations of this particularly pernicious attitude include a very narrow division of labor according to gender. Armenian women are excluded from leadership and decision-making functions in community institutions



throughout the diaspora (as well as in the Armenian S.S.R.).

It is the duty of a revolutionary organization—an organization composed of men and women—to put an abrupt halt to violence against women. We must remove obstacles to the promotion of *large numbers* of female comrades to the highest positions of responsibility, and female comrades should be actively recruited into every office. Furthermore, in recognition of the fact that women themselves are the best qualified proponents of their own demands, our female comrades should be encouraged to form their own affiliated feminist organizations.

It is not uncommon to hear orators hold forth about how Armenian institutions must increase their membership. On more than one occasion, I have observed that some of the same orators reserve a secondary role for our sisters. It is inconsistent to fight for the national rights of Armenians and at the same time deny full recognition to one-half of our nation. Inconsistencies in theory always have practical consequences. Armenian men are going to have to recognize that there are 6.5 million Armenians on this planet—not 3.25 million. Our homeland and national rights are as much the prerogative of Armenian women as of Armenian men. And the latter have the same responsibilities in relation to our struggle and national life as do the former.

Armenian women have a very important role to play in our armed struggle, too. Our female comrades have already demonstrated how well they carry out armed revolutionary activities. There is no reason why they should not be integrated directly into the armed struggle on a much larger scale in the future. Or perhaps I should say there is no *good* reason: Once we have established a presence in eastern Anatolia, we are bound to encounter some difficulties since, among the current inhabitants there, male supremacism is firmly entrenched. So there may be an initial reluctance to accept the presence of female *fedaiis*. There are precedents, however, and we will insist as an organization on achieving, gender equality. Perhaps we could even assist our non-Armenian comrades of both sexes by serving as a salutary example.

*This text, dated March 3, 1988, first appeared in print in the first edition of this book. Monte's remarks about "logic" (which appear to evoke some of Hegel's formulations) did not appear in the first edition, but were reinserted by request of the author.*

## REFLECTIONS ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE THINKING

### Causes and Consequences of Counterproductive Policies

Building a successful revolution is perhaps the most difficult task facing any group of people. Without mass participation this task will not even come close to succeeding. Mass participation depends on politicization, on elevation of the political consciousness of large numbers of people. This underscores the crucial importance of revolutionary ideology and the operation of revolutionary ideology in the daily lives of the people.

There is little hope that a protracted struggle will be successful if it is carried forward by people set in motion mainly by an idealistic attachment to a geographically distant goal. Recognizing this, Armenian militants should have no illusions as to the revolutionary potential of most diasporan Armenians, especially those from petty-bourgeois backgrounds who live outside the immediate vicinity of Turkey. Perhaps these people may in time lend secondary support to a struggle already under way; however, with the exception of a few individual cases, they are not revolutionary material.

Nor should we have any illusions about changing habits of thought of big capitalists and other persons whose vested interests are not conducive to revolutionary thinking. Rather, we should address ourselves to progressive Armenians, primarily those from nonexploiting class backgrounds in Turkey and Iran. Even among these potential revolutionaries, however, we must constantly battle against erroneous notions and widespread habits of thought associated with counterproductive actions. This is why the most highly motivated members of the diaspora must do what they can to familiarize themselves with scientific socialism.

Like Darwin's theory of evolution, Einstein's theory of relativity and other scientific "discoveries" (most of which weren't really discoveries at all, but the products of long research and hard theoretical work), we commonly refer to scientific socialism by invoking the names of its most important founders. Hence, the term 'Marxism-Leninism.'

Marxism-Leninism is actually *logic* applied to a particular subject matter—but logic in the full sense of the word. Before considering particular illogical mentalities and behaviors, let's first cast a glance at logic itself.



"Logic" is one of those commonly used words which are not well-understood. For most people, "logic" is elementary *formal* logic—that simple chain of almost mechanical reasoning used in daily life to arrive at conclusions, given unquestioned premises concerning what we observe around us. This shallow, simplistic notion of logic is in reality a deformation of logic in its full sense. For a logical conclusion to be truly valid it must take into account the totality of factors pertinent to a subject. This essential principle is more often ignored than not, perhaps in part because it requires too much time and energy to collect all the pertinent information and synthesize it. But a more important reason why so few people think critically or logically in this sense of the word is that schools, the press and a whole array of other social institutions have not accustomed people to distinguish pertinent from impertinent information. (In fact, in many countries, including Turkey, the U.S. and France, those who use logic in its full sense are quickly denounced as communists. If anything, this is a way of admitting that scientific socialism is the most accurate and realistic way of thinking.) If all pertinent factors are not brought together before inserting them into the "machine" of *formal* logic, then the conclusions are very likely to be wrong, or at least deficient. Sometimes the "machine" of formal logic seems to work well, even though all existing factors have not been inserted into it. When this happens, however, the result is often incorrect analyses, misleading conclusions and, frequently, grave errors.

Sometimes a "chain" of this sort of reasoning is intentional, a cynical way of manipulating public opinion for narrow political purposes. To take an example close to me, faced with the reality of overcrowded prisons and inhuman living conditions, the French government, true to its long tradition of arrogant, anti-popular policies, has found it perfectly "logical" (and even "conducive to French democracy"!) to construct dozens of new prisons. In other words, French authorities have made a mockery of logic by limiting their view on this issue to the fact that there are too many prisoners per cell. In the process, they have completely brushed aside more fundamental questions, such as: Why is crime on the increase? What economic and social crises are at the root of crime? Is the ruling class' definition of crime valid, in the first place?<sup>15</sup> What are we to make of the French penal system as a social institution—of the system of punishment, seen within the larger context of French society as a whole? And what sort of society is it that sustains a penal system like this, in the first place?

Pondering these questions, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that the "rationality" of French authorities has absolutely nothing to do with logic in its full sense, and everything to do with the manipulation of public opinion to legitimize further repression (in the cheapest and most efficient way possible) of the most disenfranchised and exploited segment of French society.

In other cases, otherwise sincere and honest people have resorted to a very narrow conception of logic, to arrive at faulty conclusions. Such is the case with many progressive and revolutionary forces in Turkey. Despite attempts to be more objective, some Turkish leftists have still failed to overcome their prejudices in favor of the present frontiers of the Turkish state, and many others still dismiss the legitimacy of peoples outside those frontiers (e.g., Armenians of the diaspora and Soviet Armenia; Kurds from Iran, Iraq and Syria, among others) playing a role in deciding the future of at least some regions now in Turkey. In this way, certain progressive and revolutionary forces have failed to take into account relevant factors before embarking on their analyses. This is the basic reason behind their deficient political positions vis-a-vis the Armenian question, the Kurdish question, minority questions and even certain Turkish "domestic" questions.

From these two examples, we can see that there are very different causes at the root of the mechanical use of logical reasoning based on insufficient information (ranging from deliberate attempts at manipulation to flaws in methodology by otherwise sincere people). In both cases, however, the consequences are fundamentally *illogical*.

Let's leave the cynical, anti-popular enemy forces aside for the moment and concentrate on identifying the flaws in logic and methodology of essentially friendly forces. As we do, we should keep in mind that logic, in its full sense, is not merely a machine used to crank out conclusions from uncritically accepted premises. Logic, rather, is something with which we can and should check and recheck our premises, as well as our conclusions. For example, if our Turkish comrades would take notice of the real attachment of Armenians in the U.S.S.R. (and especially in the Armenian S.S.R.) to our homeland now in Turkey, then they might recognize how unsatisfactory their premises have been so far. They might then conclude that their failure to acknowledge that those Armenians have a legitimate role to play in the future of regions now in Turkey has constituted a breach of democratic principles, and an inaccurate assessment of the Armenian national question.

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Within Armenian circles, faulty reasoning abounds. Following the example of Marx and Engels, we must get used to throwing everything into question, to checking, to being critical. As we build up a revolutionary understanding, we must at the same time tear down the old inhibiting assumptions which we have come to accept, sometimes without even being aware of them. The destructive task goes hand in hand with the constructive task. This is why one of our primary ideological and theoretical tasks is to



mount a case-by-case critique of counterproductive mentalities and behaviors. Unfortunately, there is a plethora of examples to be cited from even a cursory survey of political discourse in the diaspora. I cite several prominent examples below, examples which appear to remain invisible to the most vocal political figures in the diaspora.

### **The Tendency to Waste the Resources of the Diaspora**

Just about every Armenian political, cultural, religious, educational or benevolent institution rigorously denounces the genocide and the dispersion of our people in the diaspora. Some of them still perfunctorily evoke our homeland and the need of our people to re-establish their connection with it. They point out that the lack of contact with our homeland is the major cause of assimilation and the loss of our cultural identity. They talk about preserving Armenian art, literature and the material evidence of our cultural heritage in general, and they point out the need to provide quality education at the university level in Armenian studies.

As it turns out, however, many of their proposals would only further disperse our resources, instead of consolidating them. The main reason for this is not the incompetence or bad intentions of those who work for diasporan community institutions. Rather, it is the fact that, despite their pronouncements, these institutions do not really have a single goal toward which they can focus their energy.

We progressive patriots, however, do have such a goal. For us, the absolute priority is to form a revolutionary vanguard force in the part of our homeland within the borders of Turkey. This goal determines the direction of our attention, resources and energy, and we endeavor to convince our compatriots that they, too, should rededicate themselves accordingly.

At the same time, we realize that, except for isolated exceptions, those who can best afford to make large monetary and material contributions toward our goal are the least disposed to do so. Instead of using their resources to support the kind of revolutionary organization necessary to fight for a solution to our problems, the few wealthy compatriots who are willing to donate anything at all toward the "Armenian Cause" prefer to stuff their money down any of a number of rat holes. These include the all-too-familiar "internship" programs in Washington D.C., the "war chests" of already-wealthy professional politicians in Lebanon, France and the U.S., lobbying efforts at the United Nations, Holocaust Memorial scams, or one hundred other gaping trash receptacles. This waste has gone on for decades without any sign of letting up. Precious resources will, no doubt, continue to be squandered by the wealthiest among us, who seem to be predisposed at birth to put high hopes on bad-faith promises for "recognition" of the genocide, rather than seeking a solution to the real problem facing us, viz. the problem

of securing our right to live in our homeland.<sup>16</sup>

The "philanthropists," of course, must ignore much in order to justify their donation policies. Our long history is replete with lessons which teach that courting foreign powers is futile. And they must equally ignore the fact that, within the span of a short period of time (from the mid-seventies to the early eighties), revolutionary Armenians succeeded in creating a whole new dynamic, placing our agenda at center stage and attracting more and more patriots into our struggle. (By now, however, the feats of ignorance of the "philanthropists" should come as no surprise. Most Armenians who are bourgeois tend to identify more readily with their non-Armenian capitalist associates than with revolutionary fellow Armenians. Those with experience in the struggle as it has been waged over the course of the past ten years have known this for a long time.)

Since it is unlikely, at least in the short run, that we will receive contributions from "philanthropic" sources, existing resources must be redirected toward the focal goal. Let us consider several specific examples, to illustrate how this might be done:

We are all convinced of the importance of educating cultural and intellectual workers in the diaspora. To this end, considerable sums of money have been collected to finance university-level Armenian studies courses, programs and chairs. Now, if local governments were pressured to finance these programs, then the situation would be different. But when great resources are drained out of our communities for this purpose, then the question should be asked whether this money is being used efficiently. While it is true that several universities in the diaspora currently offer good Armenian studies programs, these programs are second-rate compared to what is offered by the State University of Yerevan and the Polytechnic Institute. What is more, Soviet Armenia already sponsors dozens of university students from the diaspora, covering their educational expenses, lodging, food, a small monthly stipend and even at least part of the costs of air fare. Since the state does not limit its sponsorship to only Armenian studies majors, a large proportion of these students specialize in other subjects. Those who go to Yerevan for Armenian studies end up getting the best education available in their field, and this at a much lower cost per student than those who attend Armenian studies programs at U.C.L.A. or Columbia University. Furthermore, both the Armenian studies students and those students who specialize in other subjects receive something that no student in the diaspora has access to: years of daily life experience in our homeland, during which time they gain a fuller understanding of our people and our culture. Students in the Armenian S.S.R. also establish lifetime friendships and cultivate a more profound attachment to our land.

In view of all of these considerations, it would be wiser to assist the State



University of Yerevan to expand its facilities, rather than donating that money to set up yet another Armenian studies chair in yet another university in the diaspora. This would also help to reinforce Soviet Armenian-diasporan relations in a concrete and mutually beneficial manner.

Another way to focus our efforts on our homeland concerns the preservation of our material cultural heritage. Literally tens of thousands of Armenian antiquities, manuscripts, church relics and other valuables are dispersed in private collections, museums and various other institutions in the diaspora. These artifacts—especially those held in private collections—are more often than not inaccessible to the large audiences who could appreciate them. And even those pieces which are to be found on public display are too dispersed to allow anything but a small proportion of their potential audience to enjoy them. This does not make it easy for researchers, either.

To make matters worse, during the past ten years we have witnessed the great endangerment of our people's cultural heritage by a handful of incompetent and venal bureaucrats who have been entrusted with protecting what should have been considered the collective property of our nation. The mismanagement of the Mkhitarian religious order's estate in Venice, Italy, provides one particularly shameful example of this. Through outrageous speculation and mismanagement, a great number of antiquities and manuscripts have been placed in danger of being confiscated by foreign companies and banks. A few criminally irresponsible persons placed both the Mkhitarian Order (which must share part of the blame) and the rest of our people in a situation which the guilty party has subsequently portrayed as our collective responsibility to resolve.

The cultural heritage of our people is, of course, a collective responsibility. However, it is so not only in times of crisis, in order to correct avoidable blunders. Now we are called upon to raise six million dollars as soon as possible—to finance the mistakes of persons who held positions of responsibility they were unqualified to occupy in the first place. Our people are being squeezed for money just to keep capitalist creditors from confiscating what rightfully belongs to our people! What is more, there is absolutely no guarantee that after this debt is paid there will be no further financial blunders of this sort. Indeed, as long as our people's treasures remain outside the jurisdiction and purview of our own collective decision-making bodies—and as long as those treasures remain in the diaspora—they probably will be threatened again some day in the future.

In addition to the mismanagement of these treasures, there is the question of public access to them. The Mkhitarians in Venice are geographically isolated from the mass of diasporan Armenians. A very small proportion of our people have ever had the chance to take the ferry out to San Lazaro

Island, where the manuscripts and other artifacts are kept. Once again, the question arises whether it serves the interests of our people for the Mkhitarians to remain in possession of our national treasures. It might be best for them to pack up every artifact in their possession which is not necessary for their continued educational and ecclesiastical functions and ship them all to Yerevan on the first safe flight. This would serve the interests of the mass of our compatriots in diaspora (who are much more likely to visit Yerevan than Venice), and it would benefit our compatriots in Yerevan, including those engaged in relevant research.

The Mkhitarians have tirelessly contributed to our culture for centuries. Like so many other institutions in the diaspora, however, the order has been subject to gradual decline. Whatever contribution the Mkhitarians have made lately has been more than outweighed by the damage they have incurred in this latest scandal.

This scandal, however, is outdone by the plunder of dozens of precious national treasures by a handful of fat, cigar-chomping, mistress-mongering so-called clergymen in Jerusalem. With the complicity of King Hussein of Jordan and Zionist authorities, these criminals in clerical garb have abused their church offices to organize smuggling scams between Amman and Jerusalem, and to auction church relics to the highest bidders in Europe. Because many church treasures are locked up in depot, beyond outside access or accountability, the clerical mafiosos have been able to hock these treasures for years on end, with little risk of being found out.

Plundering church relics was a practice advocated by Talaat Pasha and his cohorts; now it is practiced by some of the highest authorities in the church! Even worse, these gangsters have seriously compromised the Patriarchate and have contributed to a violent division in the community—a division which has claimed at least one life so far.

The function of diasporan institutions ought to be to encourage a more active cultural life, educate the youth, aid the needy, defend our people's local political interests, nurture an attachment to our people and their homeland and advance Armenian national interests. It is hard to see how depots of treasures serve any of these functions. Again, the best solution would be to pack up everything not absolutely essential to the conduct of legitimate local religious affairs and send it to Yerevan. This might also help bring back moral leadership to the community. Without the allure of lucre, there would be nothing to attract the greedy or to tempt the corruptible.

One last point: The Armenian revolutionary vanguard needs the six million dollars that was dumped into the laps of the Mkhitarians' super-rich creditors. In our hands that money would bring about very concrete results in the struggle for our national rights. Once again, however, this presupposes a radical redefinition of priorities in the diaspora.



### The Misuse of Community Schools

Armenian community schools frequently demobilize and demoralize their students. One reason for this is that curricula at most Armenian schools directly reflect the bourgeois class interests, mentalities and political orientations of those who finance and control them, rather than those who attend them. (The conservative political parties usually control schools through one church or another, and by encouraging financial donations by wealthy supporters and members of the parties.)

True, these schools do educate young people in the Armenian language, culture and history (although the approach to the latter two subjects is not usually very laudable). Nevertheless, the kind of patriotism resulting from such an education is more often than not purely emotional or folkloric. Instead of more substantive patriotism, emphasis is placed on preparation for a well-paying job within the countries of the diaspora. Meanwhile, the practical preparation of future militants is entirely ignored.

The traditional curriculum of Armenian community schools has a number of built-in taboos which discourage militancy. One of these taboos is explicitly political. In fact, at least one school director who has claimed to be preparing patriotic students actually boasts that political subjects are forbidden in his classrooms! A truly patriotic curriculum, by contrast, would *emphasize* political education, not proscribe it. One of our top priorities should be to train critical thinkers and profoundly politicized activists. Without a deep political understanding, we will not have the kind of full-time militants necessary for the struggle that lies ahead. An "apolitical" education (or, more accurately, a right-wing indoctrination) renders "patriotism" nothing more than confused, passive and evanescent emotionalism.

We have no illusions that rational discussion will somehow convince educators to adopt curricula consistent with the requirements of our struggle. This is why progressive groups in the diaspora should be commended for their work in discussion groups, lectures, periodicals, political meetings, demonstrations and the like.

The second taboo I would like to mention is linguistic. To my knowledge, the only Armenian schools in the diaspora that teach Turkish are in Turkey. And as for Kurdish, there does not appear to be so much as a single Armenian school in the diaspora which teaches it. And yet these languages, along with Armenian, are the most essential languages for those who want to do something tangible for the rights of our people. Armenians who do not learn at least one of these two languages will have much more difficulty participating on the front line of our struggle.

Unfortunately, however, there is a very regressive tendency among our compatriots in Lebanon, Syria and other diasporan countries to discourage the teaching and use of Turkish. Some confused people even consider

speaking Turkish to be unpatriotic! In these same communities, many schools teach Arabic, English or French, besides Armenian. Arabic, of course, is necessary because it is the local language of these countries. While we have nothing against English or French, from a patriotic point of view these European languages are optional or entirely dispensable. (And, to anticipate one familiar objection, the fact that English and French are taught alongside Armenian is as good as an admission that learning other languages does not detract from an appreciation or mastery of Armenian.)

Sadly, a self-defeating anti-everything-Turkish complex persists in an exaggerated form throughout the diaspora. This complex, combined with the bottom-line priority of Armenian schools to prepare future petty-bourgeois "professionals," cripples our youth. If we seriously consider our real responsibilities in our struggle, we will immediately recognize the need for members of the next generation to speak Turkish and Kurdish. For one thing, a facility in Turkish and Kurdish is a practical necessity if we plan to wage a struggle in that part of our homeland within the borders of the Turkish state. Additionally, we need to be fluent in these languages in order to study the situation in Turkey in depth and focus our efforts directly on our homeland and our struggle. By suppressing the teaching of these languages, we are reducing our ability to fight for our rights. Thus, we are harming no one but ourselves,

The third taboo is military. Although some Armenian school curricula include references to armed struggle, none include formal instruction in the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare. Even in Lebanon, where military prowess is necessary for the day-to-day defense of the community, military subjects do not make up part of the school program.

True, some youths have received very minimal nontheoretical military training in a venue far removed from the classroom; nevertheless, such rudimentary training is a far cry from what is necessary. And as for the others, if any among them wish to participate in the armed struggle in Turkey they will need a lot more than charged-up emotions and a rudimentary familiarity with Armenian history.

The experiences of the past decade of Armenian militancy show that, once in our ranks, even relatively politicized graduates of community schools take a long time to raise to the minimum level required to fully participate in the struggle. Approximately two years of constant training are required to prepare a decent military cadre. This period could and should be abbreviated by providing military training at the stage of secondary school, at the latest.

Since we are realists, it should go without saying that we do not expect the present educational establishment to provide military training. Bourgeois educators should not be expected to support revolutionary education. The most we can expect of existing Armenian schools in the diaspora are physical



fitness and health programs. Therefore, the Armenian revolutionary vanguard must assume complete responsibility to correct this situation through its own educational institutions. As soon as we are better-organized, we should found our own schools (especially in Iran). We ourselves must prepare cadres linguistically, politically, militarily and in all other domains necessary to wage our struggle and win. No one is going to undertake this task if we do not.

### Self-Defeating Behavior in Daily Life

Unfortunately, even many aspects of our daily lives conflict with our proclaimed political goals. Bad habits, of course, are not unique to our people, but this does not exonerate us from improving ourselves. I will limit myself here to only the most destructive vices, and leave it to the reader to augment the list.

Perhaps one of the best examples of avoidable self-destructive behavior is cigarette smoking. One need not even be particularly progressive to understand this, but there are additional reasons for us not to smoke. Shortness of breath, for example. ASALA military trainers have found that those who smoke are incapable of doing their best. We discourage competition between members, but we encourage competition with oneself. And it is within this framework that we have concluded that smokers cannot develop their own physical capacities to the fullest. This is actually very serious, since anyone planning to fight in the high altitude of our homeland will be pitted against well-trained and extremely mobile enemy forces (including airborne forces and helicopter gunships) with vastly superior fire power. They will need every bit of strength, breath and stamina they will be able to muster. One out-of-breath comrade could slow down an entire column, and this in turn could result in fatalities we cannot afford.

Smoking poses other dangers in battle situations, too. I recall that in September 1979 two Armenians killed in the defense of Bourj Hamoud were shot in the head, apparently by Phalangist snipers who aimed at the glow of their cigarettes at night. But even worse than the physical danger that smoking poses are the psychological weaknesses that this habit engenders. During some periods of military training, recruits have been forbidden to smoke for months on end. Some comrades were so psychologically dependent on tobacco that their initial efforts to stop smoking resulted in psychosomatic illnesses and other incapacitations. By severely diminishing a person's self-discipline, these dependencies inhibit a person from becoming a member of the vanguard, and especially a guerrilla or *fedaii*.

In view of all of this, we must emphatically discourage smoking. Although some revolutionaries in the past have smoked, in the present period revolutionaries all over the world, from Van Lin to Nelson Mandela

forswear this self-destructive habit (Dr. Fidel Castro has recently even forsworn cigars!).

A second example of rather widespread irrational behavior is cursing. More than being a habit unbecoming of a patriot or a progressive, it tends to distract one from serious analytical thinking. True, our gut reactions against injustices help others to identify our enemies and help us to rally our forces; however, it does no good to appease oneself emotionally without gaining a more profound understanding of what's going on. Revolutionary socialists must lead practical, self-disciplined lives. We must train ourselves to think calmly and objectively, and we must get used to thinking about every problem, no matter how obvious or seemingly inconsequential, in as much depth as possible. Thus, while the habitual use of profanity may be socially objectionable, the greater drawback is that it engenders sloppy thinking.

### Guidelines

Unfortunately, many diasporan Armenians misuse the term "revolutionary," by applying it to just about anyone who sings loudly after a few glasses of *oghi*. The title of revolutionary, however, should not be tossed around so lightly. A person earns the right to call herself a revolutionary through the example of personal conduct, conscientiousness and hard work. Instead of going on and on about specific cases of irrational behavior, let us briefly outline some guidelines for the kind of conduct expected of militant patriots:

Revolutionary socialists and communists are rational people. Realism, thoroughness and an analytic approach are the most important principles which guide their actions. Comrades should constantly strive to maximize efficiency, to get as close to perfection as possible, and thus to produce as many positive results as possible and build on them. This means that militants should constantly engage in criticism and self-criticism, so as to learn from successes and correct mistakes promptly when they occur. It also means that she should take the initiative to seek new, creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. The priority should always be to produce constructive results.

Our watchwords are: collective work, organization and responsibility toward others. Each comrade should cooperate with all other comrades and compete only with herself. This calls for a firm repudiation of individualism, adventurism and romanticism. It means a rejection of supposed shortcuts. Comrades should view their own work within the larger context of the movement's general long-term tasks. Naturally, this means that militants exercise a great deal of self-discipline.

The revolutionary is a perpetual student, in the sense that she appreciates the crucial need constantly to keep informed and to learn more. A militant should never remain satisfied with what she already knows. A militant,



rather, should study every situation in detail and avoid relying on generalities. Ideas and terms must be clear and well-defined.

The revolutionary is sincere, honest, practical, clean and seeks simplicity in his or her personal life. This means one should respect hygienic and dietetic rules, maintain physical fitness, wear practical, comfortable clothes (without being obsessed with fashions or decorations), avoid bad habits and unwholesome or superfluous preoccupations, avoid being lazy or messy, respect people and the natural environment, and avoid being brutish, arrogant or wasteful.

These are not merely moralistic injunctions: by practicing this style of work—by making ourselves over in the image of a new type of person—we become organizationally stronger, and pose a far more formidable threat to the enemy and a more valuable ally to our friends.

\* \* \*

Our focal enemy, the chauvinist Turkish state, constitutes an extremely well-armed force with enormous resources at its disposal, military and otherwise. The only way to overcome this enemy is by radically improving our political awareness and by translating this awareness into practice, to create tangible results. Without hard work and sober thinking, we and our allies will never be able to face down our enemy, with its hundreds of thousands of well-trained troops, jet aircraft, helicopters and sophisticated surveillance technology. Our struggle is not for personal therapy; we do not aim to provoke the intervention of foreign countries, nor will our fighters go to Turkey to become martyrs. Rather, they will go prepared to fight efficiently and in an organized fashion for *decades* if need be—and to *fight to win*. In order to do this, however, we must redouble our efforts *now* to build a fighting organization capable of eventually waging an armed campaign in that part of our homeland currently within the borders of the Turkish state.

#### Notes:

1. The first time a glossary term appears in this and other chapters it is marked with an asterisk (\*). —Ed.
2. A member of the Lebanese Communist Party, Krikorian helped to organize the military defense of the Naba'a district of Beirut at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. In 1976 he was killed by members of the Dashnak Party who collaborated with the Phalangists in the massacre and expulsion of the inhabitants of Naba'a. —Ed.
3. In the early and mid-1980s "Hagopian's" group claimed responsibility for a number of assassinations and kidnappings of prominent Armenians in Lebanon, including Dashnaks and Ramgavars. —Ed.
4. Here I refer to a rejection of genuine workers' state power, and not a rejection of the reprehensible system which has arisen in Soviet Armenia over the past decades. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]
5. Since I wrote these lines, of course, momentous changes have taken place in Soviet Armenia. The mass democratic movement and organized appeals to allow diasporan Armenians freer entry have already made immigration much easier. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]
6. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of emigrants from Soviet Armenia to the "West" trace their family origins to "Western Armenia." This might suggest that a subjective attachment to specific linguistic and cultural nuances still exercises a considerable influence on the mentality of many Armenians. —MM
7. On this point, refer to John Kirakosian's essay, "The Young Turks before the Trial of History." —MM [Publication information not provided. —Ed.]
8. Refer to the two entries, "Culturally Assimilated Armenians" and "Non-Armenians of Armenians Ancestry," in the glossary in Chapter One, above. —Ed.
9. Those being the Dashnak Party, the Ramgavar Party and the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party. —Ed.
10. Actually, there was a brief increase of Armenian literacy in the early days of the diaspora, as the Armenian language was propagated among largely Turkish-speaking Armenian communities such as the one in Lebanon. —MM
11. In a letter dated September 11, 1986, Melkonian summarized immigration statistics: "There were three major periods: 1921-36, with 42,286 immigrants; 1946-8, with 89,750 immigrants, and 1962-82, with 31,920 of them. At least 40,000 additional immigrants arrived in the Armenian S.S.R. (from outside the U.S.S.R.) in the intervening years. So the total immigration from outside the U.S.S.R. is between 200,000 and 250,000." The source of these statistics was not cited. —Ed.



12. ASALA-R.M. chronicled the emergence of these armed groups in the collectively written pamphlet, *A Critique of Armenian Armed Action, from the Early Seventies through 1983*. —Ed.
13. Refer to footnote 9, above. —Ed.
14. Manouchian was a Communist partisan leader in the French Resistance. Captured by Vichy authorities, he was imprisoned and later executed. Garlen Ananian was an ASALA member who was executed by the “Hagop Hagopian” clique after the open split in the organization in the summer of 1983. —Ed.
15. The present French penal code is still based on Napoleon’s code of 1810! —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]
16. Since the December 7, 1988, earthquake and events in Artsakh, at least some money has been funnelled into worthwhile projects. Nevertheless, these sums still don’t amount to what most wealthy Armenians should be contributing. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]

*Chapter Five***KARABAGH/ARTSAKH**



*The article below is a slightly revised version of an open letter to Pravda which appeared in the August 1988 issue of Sardarabad. Posted from Poissy Prison, it was written in early April 1988.*

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### OUR SOLIDARITY WITH KARABAGH

The latest events centered around the question of re-affiliating the Nagorno Karabagh Autonomous Oblast<sup>1</sup> with the Armenian S.S.R. have generated manifestations of solidarity throughout the diaspora. Virtually all diasporan Armenians<sup>2</sup> in one way or another support the re-affiliation of Karabagh. Without presuming to interfere in the affairs of the people of Karabagh, to whom the initiative really belongs, I would like to say a few words about the situation.

Relying on their own strength, our compatriots in Karabagh have taken the first steps to achieve their goal. In so doing, they have had the virtually unanimous support of the people of the Armenian S.S.R. As a diasporan Armenian, I have total confidence in their judgment, political awareness and capacity to determine for themselves how they should go about solving the problem. They have already shown themselves capable of leading efforts to resolve this problem.

While also registering my enthusiastic moral support for the people of Karabagh, I will address myself primarily to Armenians of the (non-Soviet) diaspora.\* It is my purpose to set forth a couple of brief remarks about the nature of the most recent initiatives in Karabagh. In addition, I would like to make several frank, comradely criticisms of several inaccurate accusations leveled against our compatriots in Karabagh and the Armenian S.S.R.

\* \* \*

Since February of this year, the people of Karabagh have stepped into a new era. On their own initiative, they have collectively assumed the responsibility to correct past irregularities which have led to the exclusion of certain parts of our homeland and people from the Armenian S.S.R. This has resulted in a popular, democratic initiative which has sought to rectify sixty-five years of irrational administrative and territorial divisions, by reintegrating one part of the Armenian homeland,\* Karabagh, back into the Armenian people's\* modern homeland, the Armenian S.S.R.

In essence, the initiative is inspired by Lenin's principled insistence on the right of nations to self-determination. Far from being limited to parochial concerns, however, this initiative has an All-Union scope, in the sense that it has been formulated according to the guidelines of the constitutions of the



U.S.S.R., the Azerbaijani S.S.R. and the Armenian S.S.R. This is an initiative, moreover, which can and should be realized within a truly internationalist context, in which the two republics involved calmly and objectively assess the facts and translate their conclusions into concrete steps forward, without allowing nationalists and chauvinists to interfere.

Unfortunately, certain circles have misrepresented the will of the people involved, labelling the latest events "nationalist," "anti-socialist" and "extremist." No one was surprised that the capitalist press, ever faithful to its reactionary instincts, would try to manipulate information concerning even the most democratic events, to dismiss them as "nationalist." We could expect little more from the "free press" in the "West," even though some impartial journalists and publications in the "West" have conscientiously conceded that the demands of the people of Karabagh are consistent with the constitution of the U.S.S.R. However, it is very surprising and disconcerting to learn that certain comrades of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. and *Pravda* should adopt the perspective of malicious commentators from capitalist countries.

The accusations which appeared in *Pravda*<sup>3</sup> were leveled against the vast majority of the people of Karabagh, as well as our compatriots and comrades in the Armenian S.S.R., who virtually unanimously supported the initiative. Since the Armenians\* of the Soviet and non-Soviet diasporas also supported it, by implication the indictment could be interpreted as having been directed against the entire Armenian people. These accusations are not in any way an accurate description of the people involved, their intentions or the mass movement of which they are a part. The author of the *Pravda* article has failed to recognize the true nature of the question.

A real problem exists. The borders of the three Transcaucasian republics, as established by 1924, were arbitrary and unfair. Historical, cultural, demographic and economic realities were incorrectly assessed, largely because of what at the moment were considered to be pressing external challenges. With respect to all of its frontiers, the Armenian homeland was whittled away. Not only do the current borders leave vast areas of our homeland (such as Karabagh, Nachichevan and Akhalkalak) administratively separated from the Armenian S.S.R., but they also leave a number of small artificial administrative "islands" on either side of the Armenian-Azerbaijan border. As a result, an irrational demographic and administrative situation has been created—one which has quite predictably fueled popular resentment.

Karabagh, too, was made an artificial "island" when the land between it and the Armenian S.S.R. was arbitrarily separated from the Armenian S.S.R. A large majority of the people of Karabagh (that is, the entirety of the three-quarters of the population which is Armenian, plus some non-Armenians)

raised its voice in February of this year to demand the reintegration of their autonomous region into the Armenian S.S.R. The people of the region, their Council of People's Deputies and the regional Committee of the Communist Party have each repeatedly invoked their constitutional right to be re-affiliated with the Armenian S.S.R. This constitutes a legal and democratic mandate to rectify an unacceptable situation which affects their daily lives.

Perhaps, in the early 1920s, there were extraordinary external excuses for deforming internal Soviet borders—reasons such as relations with Kemalist Turkey.\* However, if that was the case at a time when the U.S.S.R. was still weak and threatened, it should no longer be the case today, when the external borders of the Soviet Union have been secured against foreign military aggression. Whatever the case may have been six decades ago, the time has come to correct the problem.

Changing the status quo would in no way be "to the detriment of other peoples," as the *Pravda* article suggests. In fact, *not* re-affiliating Karabagh with the Armenian S.S.R. has proven to be to the detriment of all its inhabitants. The people of the region understand this better than anyone else. They know that Karabagh has been a part of the Armenian homeland, and they know how its exclusion from the administrative and state apparatus of the rest of the Armenian homeland has created a situation in which the normal development of Armenian national and cultural life has been hindered, especially in relation to national life and cultural development in the Armenian S.S.R. As long as this situation persists, the vast majority of the population will remain culturally disadvantaged. As we are all aware, it is largely for this reason that the Armenians of Nakhichevan, who constituted over fifty percent of that region's population in the early 1920s, gradually left their homes to resettle in the Armenian S.S.R.

The exclusion of Karabagh from the Armenian S.S.R. has also been economically detrimental to its inhabitants. It is no secret that the region is one of the poorest in the Azerbaijan S.S.R. It is also well-known that this situation is the result of the chauvinistic policies of administrative and governmental authorities in Azerbaijan. These policies in turn have led to the emigration of many Karabagh natives.

It is inevitable and perfectly natural, then, that the population of Karabagh would work to correct this situation. Indeed, all Soviet citizens, communists and internationalists should be motivated to rectify this error, because prolonging the status quo will only exacerbate present difficulties. From the perspective of an historical materialist, every error of this sort will have its consequences. An appropriate, forward-looking solution to the problem of Karabagh, on the other hand, will strengthen the Soviet Union.

Today, the restructuring of the Soviet economy is creating promising new conditions for grappling with the diverse challenges confronting the U.S.S.R.,



including national issues. The policy of restructuring (*perestroika*), however, must proceed apace with democratization and openness (*glasnost*), if it is to bear any fruit. It should be acknowledged that certain people who still have reservations about these policies may be tempted to misrepresent the Karabagh people's initiative as "a problem caused by the new policies." However, such a misinterpretation confuses the consequences of errors with their causes. The problem in this case was committed in 1923, not 1988. In fact, the Karabagh people's initiative is in no way whatsoever a "problem." Rather, it is a healthy attempt—a constitutional, democratic attempt—to solve a sixty-five-year-old problem. The orderly and responsible mobilization in the Armenian S.S.R. in support of the Karabagh people's initiative was initially characterized by enthusiasm for socialist principles and the Soviet system. One need only call to mind the slogan: "More Socialism, More Democracy!"; or to note that the mass rallies in Stepanakert and Yerevan were, in the words of one "western" correspondent, "a sea of red banners," and that hundreds and hundreds of Soviet flags, as well as portraits of Lenin and other patriotic and socialist heroes, were held aloft and prominently displayed. All of this, and much more, demonstrate clearly the attachment of Soviet Armenians (not to mention the Georgian and Kurdish\* delegates present) to socialism and our Soviet socialist homeland.

In light of these facts, the author of the *Pravda* article was not only dishonest, but his accusations of anti-socialist agitation amount to a provocation against our people as a whole. Despite our small numbers, Armenians have very actively participated in the spread of Marxism-Leninism in the Caucasus and in the "Middle East" in general, and Armenia has sacrificed disproportionately large numbers of her best sons and daughters in defense of the U.S.S.R. and all of its peoples. One need only recall the names of Shahumian, Mikoyan, Baghramian, Issakov and Babadjanian—or to invoke the memory of the 400,000 Armenian Red Army soldiers who fought with valor in the anti-fascist war—to recognize the magnitude and importance of the Armenian contribution to the defense of the Soviet Union.

Of course, Armenians are also aware that they have benefited greatly from the security of the U.S.S.R. Throughout the course of our three thousand years of history—during which kings, emperors, feudal lords and other despots have exploited our people as slaves and serfs—Armenians as a whole have never had so many social guarantees, been so well-educated or enjoyed so many opportunities to develop in various domains, as they have during the Soviet period. Armenians understand this, but wish to accelerate improvement with *perestroika*. It is unacceptable, therefore, that the deep attachment of Armenians to their homeland and ideals should be called into question—especially at a time when they are committed to finding solutions

to the accumulated problems facing them.

Socialist construction requires one problem to be tackled after another. *Perestroika*, especially in its early stages, calls for greater discipline, enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility in the daily lives and work of Soviet citizens. A satisfactory solution to the problem of Karabagh would increase the population's enthusiasm and sense of responsibility, and thus, it would be likely to have a significant impact on the economic development of the region.

Socialist policy should reflect the interests and desires of the economically productive portion of the population. The present territorial and administrative situation in Karabagh is not consistent with the interests and desires of the working people of the region. Socialist policy should be guided by popular democracy. The working people of Karabagh have collectively expressed their democratic will. According to socialist principles, then, there should be no question but that Karabagh should be reunited with the Armenian S.S.R. In fact, if everyone involved stuck to Marxism-Leninism, the inclusion of Karabagh in the Azerbaijan S.S.R. would have been such an obvious mistake that the situation would long ago have been recognized as unacceptable, and the people of Karabagh would not have needed to take this initiative. This was exactly the case in 1921, when Narimanov, the leader of Azerbaijan, formally recognized that this region (and others) did in fact constitute an integral part of the Armenian homeland.

There is only one completely satisfactory solution to the situation in Karabagh, and the people of Karabagh have themselves accurately identified it: political and administrative unification with the Armenian S.S.R. The foreseeable reaction of certain elements in the Azerbaijan S.S.R. to this correct solution merely indicates that many people have not yet achieved a level of political and ideological maturity consistent with genuine socialism. Surprisingly, however, the author of the *Pravda* article has ignored the real nationalists and extremists—those who were responsible for creating an intolerable situation in Karabagh. Instead, the writer has chosen to indict the people of Karabagh and the mobilized masses in Yerevan for promoting "national discord in an artificial manner," and making demands "to the detriment of other peoples." This misrepresentation cannot pass without protest. Rather than blaming the victim, the writer should in all fairness have leveled his accusations against the cruel and cowardly murderers responsible for the February 27 massacre at Sumgait.

The Azeri people are neighbors and compatriots of the Armenian people. Fraternal relations between the two nations must be allowed to develop unhindered. Unfortunately, the Sumgait massacre and events in other localities show that, after sixty-eight years of "socialist" development, fanatical chauvinism is not as isolated as one would have expected. Nevertheless,



many of us would prefer to emphasize the role of those Azeri families who risked their lives to protect their Armenian compatriots against our common anti-Soviet enemies. We must not allow the atrocities and provocations of a criminal minority to adversely affect fraternal relations between our two peoples.<sup>4</sup> Armenians must give their full moral and practical support to the efforts of rational Azeri compatriots to stamp out chauvinism.

Clearly, the people of Karabagh seek to strengthen cordial ties with all other peoples of the Soviet Union, and especially with their neighbors in the Transcaucasus. For various reasons, the solution to the Karabagh problem may yet take years to resolve, and may pass through various stages. I for one believe that this is something the Armenian people could understand. However, it is not at all conducive to a resolution of the problem to dismiss as "nationalism" the repeated, responsible appeals of a victimized population acting within its constitutional rights.

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The U.S.S.R. experienced the first successful socialist revolution. Today, Soviet political and military influence are enormous factors in containing imperialist aggression, in defending national liberation movements throughout the world and in providing struggling socialist and anti-imperialist forces with a greater degree of maneuverability. Countries resisting imperialist domination are hoping for the construction of a strong socialist economy in the Soviet Union which will offer prospects for an alternative future of cooperation.

The national question and the struggle for self-determination are among the greatest political concerns today. The Soviet Union should live up to its self-definition as a cooperative union of many peoples and nations. Many people would like to perceive the U.S.S.R. as an example to be followed. Reaffiliating Karabagh with the Armenian S.S.R. would eliminate a glaring contravention of the Leninist nationalities policy, and would reinforce the image of the Soviet policy-makers.

So to the question posed by the author of the *Pravda* article: "If other regions decided to satisfy their own aspirations in a similar fashion . . . what would happen to the fraternal union of peoples and to the economy of the country?" the answer is ready at hand: Such a move, at least in the case of Karabagh, would bolster the fraternity of Soviet peoples in the long run, by eliminating a source of tension and national defensiveness.

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I applaud the efforts of all of the Soviet peoples to restructure Soviet society, and I am especially encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the policy of *perestroika* by Soviet Armenians.

I would also like to express my total solidarity with any Azeri comrades who fight against those who are hostile to socialism. I believe that Armenians join Azeris of good will in supporting stronger fraternal relations between the two peoples, and among all the peoples of the Soviet Union. At the same time, we should recognize that greater internationalist understanding and objectivity are needed, and greater respect for the will of the people of Karabagh.

And finally, I salute the efforts of the Soviet peoples to push forward the restructuring of Soviet society. The future of the Armenian people, the future of the U.S.S.R. and to a large extent, the future of our planet depends on this.



*Dated July 19, 1988, "Our Solidarity with Artsakh" was written (originally in Armenian) at the height of the mass demonstrations in Yerevan for integration of the Nagorno Karabagh Autonomous Oblast into the Armenian S.S.R. Melkonian prefaced the open letter as follows: "As in the case of my April 4, 1988, letter, I am writing as a sincere internationalist, as an honest Armenian patriot and as a militant convinced of the theoretical centrality of scientific socialism. I am writing with constructive intentions, as a friend of the U.S.S.R. and all of its peoples."*

## OUR SOLIDARITY WITH ARTSAKH

Three months ago I wrote about our solidarity with "Karabagh." Today this name is no longer the correct one to use, since the overwhelming majority of the region's people and their Soviet representatives have voted to designate the region by its historical name, *Artsakh*. Moreover, the population and their democratic representatives have declared that their region is now to be a part of the Armenian S.S.R. As a Leninist, I respect the will of the population of Artsakh and defer to their initiatives and decisions. As I have stated before, I believe these decisions are in the real interests of all the peoples involved, including the Azeri people.

Despite the explicit and repeated decisions of the people of Artsakh, their Communist Party membership and their Council of People's Deputies, the highest Soviet authorities have issued incomprehensible declarations and pursued unproductive policies. During the last meeting of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., for example, it was stated that "Karabagh" must remain within the administrative frontiers of the Azerbaijan S.S.R. and, at the Nineteenth All-Union Conference of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R., it was stated that the internal borders of the U.S.S.R. are not to change. It is significant to note, however, that the constitution of the U.S.S.R. stipulates that all borders can be changed. In fact, the internal borders of the Soviet Union have been redrawn more than once, as have the country's borders with neighboring states. Even more importantly, however, Leninist principles concerning national self-determination demand that the will of the people in question be decisive. Lenin was characteristically consistent and adamant on this point, which he repeated in more than one of his writings on the national question.

Official opposition to the decisions of the democratic will of the people of the region is even more surprising, coming as it has from advocates of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Incredibly, some of the most vociferous of these advocates supported the declaration of the Supreme Soviet to the effect that, if the people of Artsakh continue to express their will through mass

movements, the authorities should use "all means to re-establish law and order."

The experiences of the past two weeks have shown us the significance of the phrase "all means." The movements in Artsakh and Soviet Armenia were initiated by the masses. Their Communist representatives enjoyed the active support of the great majority of the people of the region. In view of the facts, what kind of Marxism-Leninism is demonstrated by the present deployment of tanks in Yerevan? It is *entirely indefensible*, from a Marxist-Leninist position, to deploy violence and repressive measures against masses who defend socialist principles and the truth. Embarking on such a policy has merely exacerbated an unresolved error of the past, namely, the refusal to reintegrate Artsakh into Soviet Armenia. This policy can only result in further human casualties and an avoidable loss of faith in Soviet authorities.

The recent decisions and methods of the central authorities contradict the spirit and the letter of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Indeed, they are characteristic of the mentality and instinctive reaction of the past years of bureaucratic centralism and stagnation. In almost all other fields—economic policy, political reform, disarmament—the new policies have represented important steps forward. It is not realistic to assume, however, that progress in these other fields can long be sustained without progress with respect to the nationalities question.

Marx and Lenin knew that every process, every event has its consequences. A price will be paid for errors, and if a heavy price is to be avoided, *rectification must take place now*. Recognizing this, comrade Gorbachev has called on workers to exercise greater discipline and accountability, to engage in higher quality work, and even to accept years of sacrifice, all to begin the process of economic restructuring. Likewise, in the domain of political and administrative restructuring, new steps have been taken, including severe punishment of bureaucrats who exploit their positions for personal gain.

There is also a price to be paid to resolve national problems. For sixty-five years the Artsakh question has been left to fester. During that period, the inhabitants of the region have demanded time and again that Artsakh be affiliated with the Armenian S.S.R. Official letters and petitions have been sent, resolutions have been passed by the local Soviet, and mass demonstrations have taken place. The longer the solution has been delayed, the worse the problem has gotten. Moreover, as events of the last fifteen months have shown, an ever-higher price has been paid in innocent lives.

It has been said that in the U.S.S.R. there are nineteen smoldering national disputes, and that the re-affiliation of Artsakh would encourage other Soviet peoples to seek similar solutions to these disputes. The anti-Soviet press has long propagated the view that a solution to these national disputes would



lead to the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. It is incumbent upon our comrades in the U.S.S.R. that they refute the anti-Soviet view in practice. If there are nineteen national disputes, then it could only be in the interests of the U.S.S.R. to find nineteen solutions, as soon as possible. There will be difficulties, of course, but much worse damage can only result from ignoring these problems.

Indeed, the worst damage is likely to result from a policy of camouflaging the problem by blaming the victims. It is not at all helpful to portray the people of Artsakh as spoilers with unreasonable demands. These people have been targets of bigotry for sixty-five years. In response to their peaceful and constitutional protests, racist thugs in the Azerbaijan S.S.R. have staged riots and massacres. It is in the interest of all peoples of the U.S.S.R. to strengthen their cooperation and friendship, but the continuation of past errors does not serve this objective. Just as certain policies which once were considered to be "correct" are now severely criticized, so too the day will come when the refusal to solve the Artsakh problem will become the target of severe criticism.

I believe that Armenians of good will would still like to maintain friendly ties with their Azeri neighbors. We are aware that in the Azerbaijan S.S.R. there are true internationalists, genuine communists and friends, and we will not forget those Azeri compatriots who risked their lives to help defend Armenians against rampaging chauvinists in Sumgait. It is extremely unfortunate, however, that the latest events—coupled with the opposition of Azeri officials to the will of the people of Artsakh—indicate that, until today, chauvinists still dominate the republic. For over six decades these chauvinists have ignored the will of the people of Artsakh. Their criminal passivity (and even tacit approval) in the face of the Sumgait massacre indicates that Soviet Azerbaijan's true communists and internationalists are currently powerless against the racists. Sadly, after sixty-eight years of what was supposed to be socialist development, a portion of the population of Azerbaijan—including many within the party and republican leadership—have remained impervious to socialist values.

It is reassuring to hear that solidarity with Artsakh is growing among the fraternal Soviet peoples, and that the people of Artsakh and Soviet Armenia have begun to take direct steps to counter the self-serving bureaucracy and corruption of the past. Armenian patriots in the diaspora are extremely proud that the people of Artsakh have taken such courageous and determined steps to improve the intolerable conditions under which they have lived. We are proud that the people of Artsakh—so small in relation to the total Soviet population—have become a vanguard force within the U.S.S.R., by demanding rectification of past errors. We are also encouraged that most communists in Artsakh and the Armenian S.S.R. have taken the side of the

people. Finally, we are proud that our people and homeland are playing such an active and constructive role in demanding changes for the better in the U.S.S.R.

Of course, it is not enough merely to derive pride from the efforts of our compatriots in Artsakh and Soviet Armenia. We must express our solidarity in more practical ways. Demonstrations and material aid programs have already been undertaken. These efforts are very important and must continue to be pursued within the political limits accepted by the people of Artsakh. In addition, it is important to secure declarations of solidarity by progressive and popular forces. This is especially true in the case of official declarations of solidarity from Communist and Workers' Parties. They can offer important moral and political support to the people of Artsakh.

And most important of all, let us remember that, to help our people as a whole, we must each participate on a personal level in our struggle. Just as the people of Artsakh and Soviet Armenia have participated on a massive scale in the attempt to reunify our homeland, we in diaspora must struggle for our right to live in that part of our homeland which lies outside of current Soviet borders. Our compatriots in Artsakh have offered us a shining example. It is up to us to follow it.



*In the last two years of his life, military concerns took up an ever larger part of Monte's waking hours (and for almost two years there were few hours during the course of a day when he was not awake). He had very little time to read or write personal correspondence, let alone political essays of a nonmilitary nature. At the time of his death, a well-thumbed French edition of Sun Tzu's The Art of War was the only book left on his nightstand at his military headquarters.*

*This article was excerpted from a letter from Monte dated September 27, 1991. It is published here for the first time. Since this letter was written, of course, the dislocation and loss of life on both sides of the conflict has indeed escalated.*

### LETTER FROM SHAHUMIAN

Dear Brother,

About two and one-half weeks ago I went to the region of Shahumian, to the north of "Nagorno Karabagh." I arrived on September 12, so I was there to participate in the offensive to retake the Armenian villages which had been occupied a few months earlier by the Azerbaijani military police, "OMON."

The offensive began on the fourteenth. There were 120 fighters on the Armenian side, consisting of local villagers, fighters from Mardakert and brigades from different parts of the Republic of Armenia. I myself was the only diasporan Armenian\* present. There were probably about the same number of Azeri fighters on the other side, almost all of them members of OMON. Compared to what I have seen in the past, the Armenian side was better armed than usual. We had anti-aircraft heavy machine guns, light machine guns, katyusha rockets, one small 80mm cannon (which I and one other guy manned), AKM and AKS assault rifles, and some *carabines*. Nevertheless, the Azeris were better armed than us, and they held much better positions.

All night we had been fired on without responding. At 6:20 a.m., our cannon shot the first round, to mark the beginning of the offensive. The battle was well-planned and rather organized. We managed to take three of the four mountain peaks, as well as the major village of Bozluk, all within about four and one-half hours. The fourth peak, which was totally surrounded and had to hold out at all cost, put up a very stiff resistance. At 1:00 p.m., a helicopter showed up to airlift the OMON fighters off that last peak. The helicopter was fired on heavily, but it managed to land and evacuate the remaining Azeri fighters.

By 1:30 p.m. everything was over. There were three Armenians killed and

a number of light injuries. On the Azeri side there were fifteen dead, of which thirteen were OMON or other fighters and two were Azeris who had entered the village to loot it. We captured three other wounded Azeris, including a captain, along with their 100mm heavy cannon with thirty-two shells, an Ural three-axle truck, a "66" two-axle truck, three jeeps, one wheat harvester, thirty head of cattle, twelve AKS rifles, three Magarov pistols and a limited amount of ammo. Most importantly, we retook Bozluk and the strategic peaks.

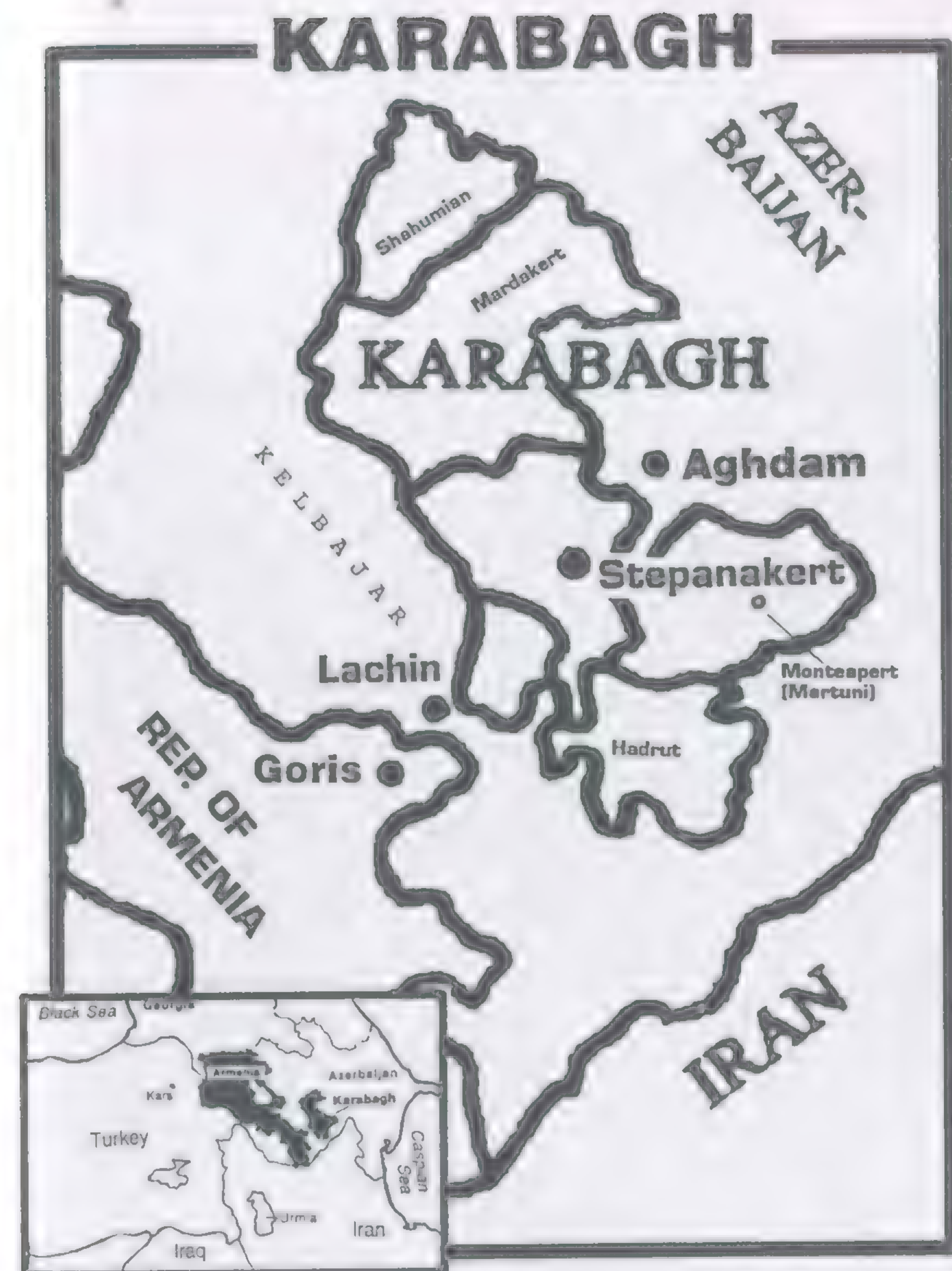
The next day we entered the second village, Manashit, without a fight, but at 6:00 p.m. the Azeris began a counteroffensive, using an armored personnel carrier. This was beaten back within two hours. The day after that (September 16), they tried two more counteroffensives with three A.P.C.s. These were beaten back, too. That same day, they began shelling Karashinar, in the eastern part of the Shahumian region. That shelling continued for three days and caused a lot of material damage, as well as two casualties. On the eighteenth, we entered the third village, Erkej, leaving only four kilometers between our positions and Mardunashen.

All in all, I was impressed by the whole campaign. This last offensive shows that a lot can be done if the Armenians receive the arms they need. The diaspora must get more active *now*. Aid is needed immediately, because the situation following the August coup in Moscow has left the scene totally set for serious conflict between Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia.



## Notes:

1. Refer to the map at the end of this chapter. —Ed.
2. Refer to "Armenians" and "Diasporan Armenians," in the glossary in the last section of Chapter One, above. The first time a glossary term appears in this and other chapters (except Chapter One) it is marked with an asterisk (\*). —Ed.
3. On March 31, 1988? —Ed.
4. Today it is clear that what seemed to be a criminal minority has become a mass movement. This fanaticism only emphasizes the need to reintegrate Artsakh into Soviet Armenia immediately. —MM [Footnote added June 1990. —Ed.]





*Epilogue*  
IMPERIALISM IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER



*This epilogue is a highly condensed version of a monograph, dated June 8, 1990, which Monte mailed to the editor, along with his corrections to the first edition of The Right to Struggle. The original monograph, some 35,000 words in length, was entitled Socialism, Confusion and Our Homeland: Reality, Reactions and Overreactions. In a letter dated June 15, 1990, which accompanied the monograph, Monte stated that his aim was, first and foremost, to orient members and sympathizers to the new developments in the defunct "socialist" bloc.*

*The article first appeared in its present abbreviated form in the June 1991 issue of Sardarabad. Abridgments were made without the author's prior approval; however, in the summer of 1991 Monte reviewed the article as it appears here and did not request any modifications when the editor suggested including it in the present book.*

*Needless to say, many developments have taken place since this article was written. On August 23, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia issued a document heralded in the West as a "Declaration of Independence." The wording of the document was ambiguous and even logically inconsistent; nevertheless, in hindsight it is clear that elected representatives of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia—now renamed "The Republic of Armenia"—had embarked on a course which Monte long opposed, and which he considered to be inimical to the long-term welfare of the Armenian nation.*

*Once it became clear to him that the Soviet Union was in a process of collapse rather than reform, Monte refocused his attention almost exclusively on military matters at hand in Karabagh. From that time on, he refused to endorse publicly any existing Armenian political party. On one occasion, someone asked him what Armenian party he would be a member of if he had to join one of them. His answer: "I'd join the cake party [tkhvatsneri gusagtsutian]." At least cake, he explained, has some use these days.*

*It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Monte's most general philosophical and political outlook changed fundamentally after his arrival*



*in Armenia in November 1990. True, his assessment of Soviet "socialism" became much harsher. Nevertheless, judging from interviews, conversations, letters and articles such as the one reprinted here, he remained a committed Marxist and an anti-imperialist in the last years of his life.*

## IMPERIALISM IN THE "NEW WORLD ORDER"

As I stated, I, like many others, have indiscriminately attached the label "socialist" to states which in reality had very little to do with democratic workers' power. The events of the past five years or so have shown that my use of the term reflected more my own wishful thinking than a sober theoretical assessment of evidence available to me.

There are, of course, "reasons" for this wishful thinking: Militants who have for years dedicated themselves to struggles for popular democracy, national liberation and workers' power have faced an uphill battle in the last decade, so it is not surprising that many of us would fall for flattering characterizations of our enemy's enemy. To their credit, however, few of my comrades have ever subscribed to the notion of adopting the Soviet Union as our model of development. In the face of enormous difficulties confronting us on all sides, however, it was comforting for us to believe that there did at least exist a safe rear base of socialism.

None of these excuses, however, can expunge our miscalculation. The revelations of the past few years have swept in like a cold tide, to wash away our illusions about "existing socialism." It is now clear that the task facing us has *always* been more difficult than we had imagined in the past.

Today, socialists are almost everywhere in opposition. In the Soviet Union and elsewhere, the term 'imperialism' has even been dropped unceremoniously from the official lexicon. This term, we are to believe, was merely a bellicose flourish of obsolete cold war rhetoric, a word with no instantiation in the real world of the late twentieth century.

And yet, at the same time we hear of "One Great European Home," and of a U.S.-Russian "partnership," the gap between rich and poor countries continues to grow, as does the gap between the rich and the poor within the "post-industrial" capitalist countries themselves. While some European members of self-proclaimed communist parties proclaim the end of the Way of the Guerrilla, the Reagan Doctrine has scored success after success—in Kampuchea, El Salvador, Grenada, Tanzania, Mozambique, Guatemala, Panama, and most recently in Nicaragua—pursuing that very path in reverse. With several notable exceptions, including Palestine, Southern Africa and the Philippines, workers and peoples dominated by imperialism now find themselves disarmed—militarily, politically and ideologically.

Class struggle is being waged ferociously, but in some places it is being waged by client states of the U.S., with almost no organized opposition.

In the coming decade and the century which follows, the imperialists themselves will dash the sweet dreams of the sentimentalists on the left. In the *maquiladoras* and shantytowns, the barrios, haciendas and *favelas*—and in the "post-industrial" capitalist countries themselves—the class struggle will reassert itself as a two-way struggle. In the meantime, much water—or rather blood—will continue to flow under a thousand bridges in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the "Middle East." Far from relenting in the face of Soviet capitulation, the flow will turn into a torrent.

In the case of the Armenian people, however, we face a particular urgency. We cannot wait and see. Because of our location on the geopolitical map, the consequences of waiting and seeing may very well turn out to be catastrophic. For the past five years, and especially since 1988, an avalanche of events has radically changed Soviet Armenia. Armenians have been the targets of repeated discrimination on the part of some Soviet officials, as well as indiscriminate violence on the part of Azerbaijani officials.

Regardless of how serious, justified or deeply felt a nation's grievances are, however, it makes no sense to protest by adopting policies which are likely to endanger the very existence of one's nation. As I have argued at length, both here and elsewhere, Armenian secession from the Soviet Union would constitute just the sort of stupid move which history has never forgiven.

Armenians, of course, are not the only people to suffer from disorientation. Indeed, confusion has become a general feature of the political landscape. 1989 seems to have marked a high point so far. Unfortunately, however, none of the basic conditions for the upheavals of that year have disappeared. Economic reforms have not been successful; production has fallen precipitously; there are now shortages of even staples, and unemployment continues to grow, while prices rise much more rapidly than wages. There are strong indications, then, that even more drastic twists and turns could very well lie just around the corner.

In such a situation, confusion is to be expected. In the present case, however, the political weather vane has swung ever further to the right. Some people are pressing for an abrupt shift to capitalism, while others demand a return to the old-style authoritarian control of society. Racism and the narrowest forms of nationalism are also on the rise. The chauvinist organization Pamyat, for example, enjoys the sympathy of a dangerously large number of Russians; racist mobs in Georgia, Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan have murdered defenseless minorities; and in Azerbaijan large-scale pogroms and terror campaigns have become widely accepted and supported by much of the population—and even defended by local authorities. The colonial project of Zionist organizations is now advanced openly, as tens of



thousands of Soviet citizens are hounded and cajoled into immigrating to stolen Palestinian land.

I have attempted to make the case that the widespread antipathy in the ex-"socialist" countries toward anything deemed socialist or communist has its origins in the economic systems, institutional structures and state policies of the respective "socialist" states. Social discontent as widespread as this is not the result of a collective hallucination. Nevertheless, as the rise of fascism earlier in this century illustrates, such discontent can lead great masses of people to irrationally adopt political agendas which are inimical to substantive democracy.

Today, the dominance of bourgeois ideology is monolithic and uncontested. Joseph Goebbels himself would have admired the ideological conformity that has descended over eastern Europe. Even many C.P. members, who once subscribed to a dry catechism of clichés which had nothing to do with genuine Marxism, now subscribe to the most pathetically threadbare pre-Keynesian superstitions about the "free market."

Capitalism is almost always portrayed by eastern Europeans as an efficient system in which man's creativity is set free. This picture is frequently bolstered with examples culled from the economic development of the U.S., (West) Germany, Japan, Italy and the other handful of exploiting capitalist centers. What they overlook, of course, is that the wealth of the imperialist metropolises (a wealth which is by no means enjoyed by all the inhabitants of those metropolises) could not exist without the cheap raw materials, labor markets and capital and commodity markets of the impoverished countries which make up the greater part of the capitalist world.

It is also significant that so many starry-eyed admirers of the "West" regularly denounce the U.S.S.R.'s interference in the internal affairs of their own countries, while remaining silent about so many other instances of aggression. And yet even the worst episodes of Soviet intervention (Hungary and Czechoslovakia, for example) never resulted in more than a very small fraction of the destruction, violence and human suffering caused by imperialist intervention in such places as China, Algeria, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Lebanon and El Salvador (not to mention well over 100 million people whose lives were snuffed out in conflicts among the colonial and imperialist powers in this century alone).

Confusion may be a general feature of the political map these days, but the degree of confusion is not the same everywhere. Indeed, millions of people in the so-called Third World have never lost their sense of direction. Few socialists in Asia, Africa and Latin America entertain illusions about the disappearance or mellowing of imperialism. These people have experienced capitalism at closer range than have the peoples of eastern Europe. After all, it is the former who constitute the largest part of the population of the

capitalist world. The lives of these hundreds and hundreds of millions of people are mute testimony to the fact that the affluence, pluralism, and "tolerance" of the minority of capitalist countries are predicated on super-exploitation and the systematic looting of their resources. The sweat and blood of hundreds of millions of Asians, Africans and Latin Americans has only exacerbated their abject prostration to international lending institutions. Behind every opulent shopping center in the "post-industrial" capitalist "North," squalid hovels stretch out to the horizon.

And because people tend to resist being exploited in this manner, the profits and strategic interests of the imperialist states must be secured by force. Thus, the famous "democracy" of the affluent "North" has been denied to the vast majority of the inhabitants of the capitalist countries. Millions and millions of Asians, Africans and Latin Americans have known only draconian dictators, "disappearances" and dirty wars—or worse still, the grotesque charade of "democracy" imposed by U.S. military advisors and death squads.

To listen to the corporate press expostulate about the failure of "socialism," one would never guess that the poverty and misery endemic to capitalism is worse now than it has ever been before. Nor would one guess that the gap between rich and poor capitalist countries is growing wider and wider.

From the very beginning capitalism has been ruthless. Indeed, even after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, it is still difficult to fathom the enormity of the carnage which was the most salient product of emerging capitalism. The historical reality of primitive accumulation is often overlooked these days, but as the five-hundred-year anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas draws near, we should bear in mind that the native peoples of the Americas were driven from their land by the European colonizers; they were massacred, wiped out by disease and enslaved in mines where they would be worked to death in a matter of months. Their civilizations were destroyed, their land was seized and their resources were pillaged. (If the suffering of non-Europeans ever counted for much to the corporate media, they would have referred to the decimation of the indigenous population of North and South America as "The Holocaust"!)

And at the same time as millions of Indians were in the process of being exterminated, the colonial powers emptied African villages to ship millions of other people like cattle to slave markets in the American colonies. Untold numbers of human beings were crammed into slave ships and died at sea, while the survivors were worked to death on plantations, or survived only to witness their children chained, beaten and sold to the highest bidder.

The industrialization of Europe and the opening of foreign markets was equally ruthless. The British colonialists forced millions of Chinese into opium addiction, coolie labor and prostitution, while in India self-sufficient



peasant economies were deliberately destroyed, resulting in periodic waves of famine and massive starvation. European colonial rule spread throughout the world, looting each region for what it had, squeezing each people for everything they could give. This is how the European countries acquired gold and silver for their treasuries; sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco and rum for their cupboards; and cotton, rubber and copper for their mills.

This is not inflammatory rhetoric or the fabrication of some propagandist's imagination: this is an all-too-real and all-too-incomplete account of the facts. D.H. Lawrence was quite correct when, in 1923, he wrote, with reference to the "democratic" "West," that "Men murdered themselves into this democracy." Nor can the catalogue of cruelty and waste be dismissed as ancient history: the present-day imperialists are every bit as brutal as the conquistadores and colonialists of the past—but today, in the age of the computer, the I.M.F. and the helicopter gunship, the heirs of the legacy of primitive accumulation are far more efficient.

True, anti-colonial liberation wars and workers' movements have forced the imperialists to mitigate some of their abuses and use indirect methods to secure submission. Except in extreme cases, for example, local authorities and military forces now do the dirty work for the foreign capitalists, and farcical elections have taken place here and there to rubber stamp government by death squad. For the productive masses, however, the results are the same: exploitation, oppression and a downward spiral of poverty. Today, not only is there more misery at the global level on an absolute scale but, as the gap between rich and poor countries has grown, whole subcontinents have been plunged into famine worse than they have ever known before.

Even in its most liberal guise, capitalism is not a system worthy of support. In fact, right at this moment, when millions of people in the ex-"socialist" bloc are blindly rushing toward it at full speed, millions of other people in dozens of other countries throughout the world are making every sacrifice to throw this system off their backs. In the Phillipines, El Salvador, South Africa, Chile, Brazil and Palestine—indeed, in every capitalist-dominated region of our planet—the bravest and best women, men and even children are carrying forward the fight for real democracy and socialism.

I know that nothing I say here is likely to make the least bit of difference to those who dream of an impossible paradise in which everyone is a capitalist. Perhaps only a long dose of real capitalism will counterbalance the bitterness they nurture toward what they call socialism. In any case, it is sad that so many eastern Europeans have chosen to swing from one illusion to another, instead of forging a new way forward: socialism without inverted commas.





**M**onte Melkonian was born in California's San Joaquin Valley on November 25, 1957. A third-generation descendant of one of the first Armenians to settle there, he left the United States at the age of twenty. Since then, he was present during the first phases of the Iranian Revolution and participated in the self-defense of the Armenian community in Lebanon, the guerrilla resistance in mountainous Kurdistan and the combined Lebanese-Palestinian anti-Zionist wars. Because of his activities as an Armenian militant, he spent years living underground and in prison. From late 1990 until his death in battle on June 12, 1993, Melkonian was a legendary military commander who lead Armenian forces in the region of Karabagh to one victory after another. A trained archaeologist, he spoke over seven languages. His writings include numerous articles on Armenian history, political and organizational questions and military tactics.

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